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A decorative rectangular frame containing the title. The frame is filled with intricate floral and leaf patterns in a golden-yellow color. The top and bottom edges feature clusters of five-petaled flowers and sprigs of leaves. The frame has a slightly distressed or aged appearance.

MAINTREE

BERNARD HELDMANN.

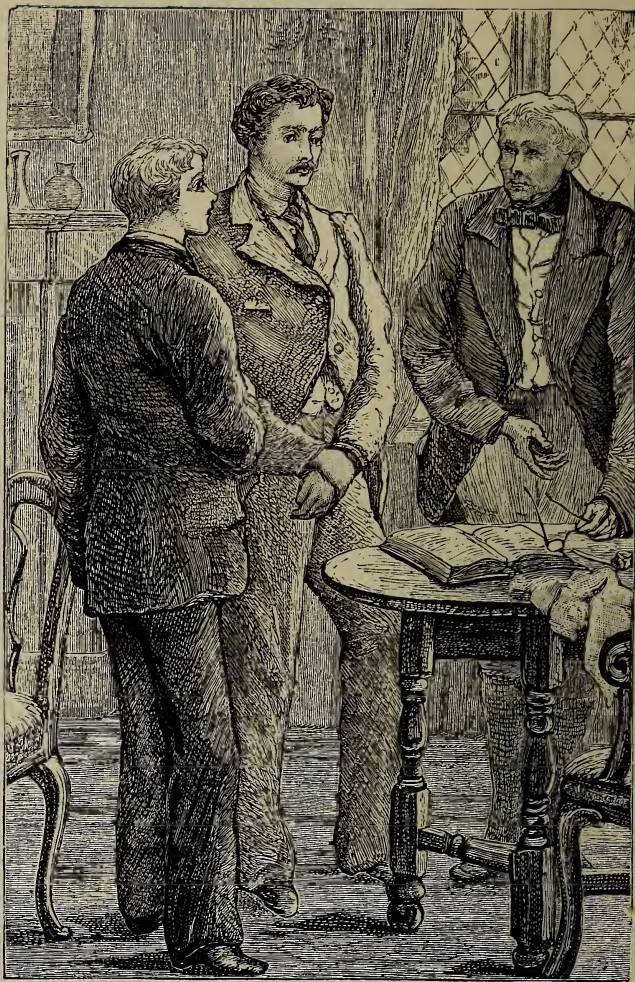


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DAINTREE.

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“ He led them to the table where the great Bible lay.”—Page 213.

DAINTREE.

BY

BERNARD HELDMANN,

UTHOR OF

"EXPULSED," "DORRINCOURT," "BOXALL SCHOOL," ETC.

LONDON:

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DAINTREE.



CHAPTER I.

JOHN FREEMAN.

HAIN FRISWELL, in one of his well-known essays upon "The Gentle Life," makes some very just remarks upon old age. He rightly concludes that that state of mind which inclines some of us to look upon it with pity, if not contempt, is altogether wrong. It rather resembles that stage of the plant in which the swelling bud is about to burst into the perfect flower; it is that moment when, standing upon the threshold of the life which is to come, we are able to look back with unfevered eye upon the life which is almost past, in the deep and perfect joy of the knowledge that our day's work is almost done. Surely there is nothing pitiful in that, and surely there is nothing worthy

our contempt? When the labourer's task is done, he rejoices to think that he is worthy of his hire; when the evening comes, he looks forward with the completest satisfaction to his rest. If the day's labour has been faithfully performed, that rest is sweeter, and the wages he receives are doubly dear.

John Freeman was an old man; he had seen more than threescore years, years of labour, years of unending toil. Day after day, year after year, had he done what he was sent into the world to do, earned his bread by the sweat of his brow. Such a career is in itself a psalm; it needs no words to sing its praise. It is folly to pretend that there is the romance of the idle life; it is the purest nonsense to suppose that such a career can be shrined in beauty. There is no poetry in idleness. If so, then the inhabitants of our lunatic asylums are the most poetical beings in the world, for they are incapable of reasonable continued labour either of the brain or hand. There is poetry in rest from toil, that is the romance and the crown of glory. It needs but a moment's thought to perceive that to the idle man apply Christ's words to the unfruitful vine, "Why cumbereth it the ground?" He

works his own ruin, and, in the long run, the ruin of all those who follow after him.

But in the life of this John Freeman, the more we see of it the more we perceive the inevitable conclusion to which it tends, the more clearly do we understand that this is a more perfect poem than any poet has yet written. He was getting into years now. He was very tall as a youth, upright as a dart, broad and strong; but he was different when he first appears upon our page. Sixty years are sixty years; let your life be what you will physically, you are changed. The man who wastes his substance in riotous living, or the man to whom existence means stagnation, is, as a rule, for all practical purposes a centenarian at sixty. John Freeman was still broad, and he was still strong, but he was no more upright; his back was bent, and his head was bowed; he would never again, this side the grave, be the stalwart fellow which he once was. The labourer's task was almost done. Not that he was laid upon the shelf: he was still the head which he had always been; he still was his own master; he walked without a stick, and, if his steps were slower, they still were sure, and he would do a good

day's journey in a day. Nor was there any sign yet of that decay of mental powers which those near and dear cannot see without a sigh. The sight of a strong man feeble is melancholy to us all ; we cannot help thinking of what he once has been, and the memory almost swallows up the knowledge of what he will be soon. But that day had not yet come to him ; he was still the shrewd, clear-sighted, cautious farmer he had always been, as capable of managing his own affairs as in the days of long ago.

He was nothing extraordinary to look at. We are so fond of the uncommon that to say a man is what we call commonplace, is almost synonymous in one's eyes to saying he is uninteresting. Do we suppose he is uninteresting to his God ? and what are we?—are we commonplace, or the reverse ? Better be delf than china ; it is more useful, and wears better too. Of this we may be very sure, every man is interesting to himself ; and since the commonplace must be in excess of the uncommon, it appears to us that, if we wish to receive benefit, we shall do no harm in taking for our study that order of creation to which we have the most probability of belonging. Therefore,

unless we wish to disparage ourselves—and that would be a somewhat novel feature in our characters—to say that John Freeman was nothing extraordinary to look at, is to say nothing in his disparagement. Compared to the glory of heaven this world is nothing to look at, but how should we be if the great Father regarded us the less on that account?

He looked what he was, an honest, homely English yeoman, and we do not know what better thing we can appear; his character was written in his face. There was confidence in his eye, and determination in his mouth; his square-set jaw and thin compressed lips meant resolution and obstinacy, which you please, both are righteous in their place, both unrighteous out of it; his brow was broad and open,—it was creased in innumerable wrinkles, and the colour of old parchment, but it showed that his intellectual powers were equal to the average; his hair was silver grey, and short and thick; he wore neither beard, whiskers, nor moustache, and this, which threw his features into prominent relief, tended to make him appear hard and stern; altogether, his head being large and massive, his dress simplicity itself, so far as appearance went, he

might well have figured among those early Puritan fathers from whom his ancestry was drawn.

He was a man of action, not of thought; he had no theory—it is more than doubtful if he could have told you what “theory” meant. Consciously he had no ideal; he was no more capable of doing what the dreamer and the poet does, building castles in the air, than he was of flying. He did, that was enough for him; life was to him one continual round of doing; contemplation was not part of his philosophy; he neither looked forward nor looked back, he simply went straight on. Certain axioms he had imbibed, as it were, with his mother’s milk; why they were and how they were he would have been puzzled to explain, neither argument nor definition might be reckoned as strong points of his. Intellectually he was no shining light; what we understand by genius was strange to him; he was a disciple of no school, a preacher of no philosophy. Let it be understood that we by no means hold him up for imitation; we simply draw the man, let others judge him with their own judgment. He was no politician; he busied himself with his own affairs, turning neither to the right

hand nor to the left; and so long as he did what there was to do, he aimed at nothing further.

Education was for the rich when he was a boy; ignorance was the birthright of poverty. Though he certainly never belonged to that portion of humanity which owns to poverty, on the other hand, he was never rich, and the education which in those days was deemed enough for him, would be deemed enough for no one now. He could read after a fashion, he could write, he could spell fairly well, and that was all; and he could add up figures at a pinch, but he was never sure that the result was exactly what it ought to be, and he always preferred to pay and receive upon the nail, and have as little to do with bills as possible. Of geography he knew literally none, of history he had the faintest notions; his history was rather tradition: his father had told him the stories which his father had told him, and which, as in duty bound, he re-told to his sons when their turn came. Oliver Cromwell and his times comprised all secular history to him, and his notions of that tremendous period were rather vague than accurate. But if you come to Bible history,

no doctor in divinity, no theological specialist, could know more than he. From the Bible he practically learned to read; the school-dame who was responsible for his scholarship pursued the method adopted by Mrs. Susannah Wesley, which Mr. Joseph Benson, in his edition of John Wesley's journal, rightly calls peculiar, but wrongly peculiar to herself; having taught her pupils their letters from the Bible, she gave them the first chapter of Genesis to read, and then set them to read straight on. If he ever read another book, beyond dabbling in Foxe's "Martyrology" and Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress," it is not on record.

But there is another education besides the education to be got from books, a practical knowledge experience alone can give. In his own way he was master of his trade; as his father had been before him, he was a farmer born and bred. He knew the signs of the sky and the signs of the seasons; he knew his land, and what it was capable of doing, as well as he knew himself; but his knowledge of both was equally imperfect. No man knows himself as God does, and it is obvious that, with John Freeman's education, he could not

know—as the moderns know—the capabilities of his land. But so far as his knowledge went, it was complete; he was thorough so far as his lights allowed; whatever his hand found to do he did it with his might. It was too late for him to be a scientific agriculturist, too late for him to understand the principles of model farming, but what he did understand, he understood right well; he loved his labour, his heart was in it, he was proud of it—righteously proud, as we should be of a good thing.

God had been good to him in giving him that first and greatest blessing, a good wife—a wife who had stood by him through sunshine and through clouds, who had made his burdens lighter by making them her own—a wife who was indeed bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh, with whom he had entire sympathy, and in whom his most sacred confidence reposed.

It was a pleasant thing to see these two together; she was as old as he, silver-haired, but not so bent; her face was very plain, but very sweet; her hair was like a silver coronal around her head, crowning the smile she always had for him. He was her “man,” her

“master,” the head and front of all her earthly hopes and fears; she was his softer half, she softened him; she was very tender, and before her tenderness he grew tender too; her voice was sweet and low, her variations of tone were manifold; she never raised her voice, yet perfectly expressed the varied feelings of her soul. Her susceptibility to sympathy was wonderful; she was like a musical instrument highly strung, which answers to the slightest touch. As if instinctively, she took her mood from him; she never jarred him with false harmonies. He would sometimes wonder, as she sat by his side, and the evening sun stole across the long, low, level fields, and through the window pane, his great, strong fingers trifling gently with her silver locks, how it was that he always felt bettered by her presence, and he would compare her to the harp which David played to Saul.

“John,” his wife would say, as he sat musing thus, “what is it you are thinking of?” The smile which stole across his face as he replied, it always did her good to see.

“I would not make thee proud, wife,” and his low, deep tones were gentler than they were wont to be, “but I was thinking of the

goodness of the Lord in that He gave me thee. You've been to me like the cruse of oil was to the Zarephath widow, a never-failing help and comfort. I do believe, Mary, that such a woman as thou is the best gift God can give to man; say, Mary, what is it has made thee so good a wife to me?"

"John," and she would lift her eyes to his with the love-light in them of a woman's loving smile, "shame on you that you should ask me that! My man, could I love you, and be to thee a thankless wife? No, John, you know there is no need to answer when you ask like that; for are you not my John, and am I not thine?"

"God bless thee, lass!" he then would say, "God bless thee, lass!" He would stroke her hair, speaking as if in thought, "'Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.' My lass, thou hast been very good to me, God will reward thee in the end."

"In the end! and has He not done so now! Nay, John, how foolishly you talk. All my days are my reward, all my life with thee. As though, too, you had not been a good man to me! My master, if all husbands are to their

wives as you have been to me, then praises must be going up from women's hearts continually to God."

Then after this there would be a pause, and they would think a while. If it were week-day, her knitting-needles would be flying to and fro, for she never was idle, finding time to work and minister to his comfort too. But if it were the Sabbath, and they were back from chapel, the great old Bible would be on the table ready to their hands, and he would put his spectacles upon his nose, and turn its pages with reverent hands. She would wait while he did so, or she would ask him to find a particular passage, which they would read together, or he would read aloud while she sat listening by. After such a conversation as the foregoing the hundred and third Psalm was one which he would often read. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits." His voice would thrill as he read on, and there was a deep earnestness in his tone, which told that he spoke with his heart and not with his lips alone. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them

that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are dust. As for man, his days are as grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him, and His righteousness unto children's children." And then, when he came to where the Psalmist again raised his song of praise, he would lay his left hand upon the open page, put his right arm about his wife, and lift up his eyes to heaven; he knew the words so well by heart he did not need to read them to her. "Bless the Lord, ye His angels, that excel in strength, that do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word. Bless ye the Lord, all ye His hosts; ye ministers of His, that do His pleasure. Bless the Lord, all His works in all places of His dominion: Bless the Lord, O my soul." Silence would follow; then, turning, he would fold her to his bosom, and kiss her on the brow; and so they blessed the Lord.

That was the long anthem of her life, "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name." Had she lived a

century she could hardly have told all she had to bless Him for ; no need for her to say, "Forget not all His benefits," they were so many, so various, so ever present, so ever being added to, that it was impossible she should forget them for a single instant even. All was from Him ; everything in the world was to her a blessing, and it was all from Him ; until her life was forgotten, she could not forget His loving-kindnesses. She and her master were at one in this as they were in all other matters, though, had they been able to analyse each other's hearts, they would have perceived that they looked at it from somewhat different standpoints. His thanksgiving was militant, as his forefathers' had been. "Bless the Lord, O my soul," and woe unto His enemies ; hers quiescent, as was fitted to her gentle nature, "Bless the Lord, O my soul," and pity those who stray.

She had a rare faculty of acquiescing in his will ; she never pulled one way while he strained his back to pull the other ; she always consulted him before a thing was done. In domestic matters he filled his place, and she filled hers ; in his own department he was master, while in hers she was mistress ; home

was home to him, she knew it, and made it sweet as home should be. "Whoso findeth a wife, findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord;" she remembered that, and she proved it true. There was no need for effort on her part, it came naturally. Woman's highest destiny on earth is marriage, her truest sphere, her greatest duty, her supremest joy; wifehood proves a woman, tries her as in the fire. The truest woman is the truest wife. Mary Freeman needed no evidence to show her the holiness, the joy of marriage; simple soul, she knew Paul's words: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your husbands, as unto the Lord;" and as he bade, so did she.

Nor was John Freeman slow in performing his part in this "great mystery." How often had they two sat over that fifth chapter of Ephesians, and read it line by line!

"There was no need, John," his wife would say, "for Paul to bid a wife submit unto her husband, for if she loves him she must do so." Then John would consider before replying, for in this matter, as in all others, he had somewhat of the leaven of the spirit of his Puritan fathers, being inclined to accept with them that twenty-second verse simply as it stands:

“For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church.”

“Wife,” he would reply, taking his pipe from between his lips, for he was fond of a pipe, was John, “there is no marriage without submission. Woman is not first but second; and if she does not obey her husband, then she is no wife.”

This was laying down the law with rigour. Woman, alas! is no more perfect than is man; indeed, she proves her imperfection by being every whit as ready as ever man could be to break the law because it is. Mary Freeman, gentle spirit though hers was, was not insensible to that disposition characteristic of womankind, pressing her to do battle for her sex.

“But,” said she—she never raised her eyes, but knitted right on—“but, John, all men are not like you; some are so bad that women are their betters.” Whereat John, who knew that his wife had, if she chose, a power of speech the equal of his own, girded up his thighs, and made ready for the fray.

“It is not for me to deny, wife, that men are bad, but let their wives consider well before they decide that they will do more good by



“ ‘Wife,’ he would reply, taking his pipe from between his lips, for he was fond of a pipe, was John, ‘there is no marriage without submission.’ ”—
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disobedience than by submission." He paused, but seeing she did not go on, he did instead. "In marriage, the woman becomes part of the man, and the man of the woman. There is the fifth Ephesians, thirty-first, 'And they two shall be one flesh;' as she has her duties, so has he. 'Nevertheless, let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.' But, Mary"—he put his pipe back in his mouth, and looked at her a while—"there is no submission in true marriage; where there is love, where they two are no more two but one, each submits as of course unto the other. I would have thee obey me, wife, but thou lovest me so well that with thee obedience is love; and I love thee so well, my lass, that what thou wouldst so would I, and what I would so wouldst thou. I am the head of the wife; but thou art me, and I am thou."

"John," and the immortal words sounded very sweet from the old woman's lips, "whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death

part thee and me ;' for thou art my man, and I am thine indeed." And one of her hands would leave her knitting, and steal to his, and there they two old folk would sit, hand in hand, and muse a while, until bedtime came, and they knelt down together in evening prayer.

Their lives were very quiet ones. The Juggernaut of civilisation might trample on time-honoured creeds; marching intellect might hold a mirror in its hands, and call its reflection God; the world might rage, nations might furiously contend; people might tone down the ancient faiths until religion was a sham,—but quietly they lived on.

“ My mind to me a kingdom is,”

the poet sings; they might well say it of their home. In it to them centred all their earthly hopes, and joys, and fears; it was to them the prelude—the only prelude—to their eternal home. The world went whirling on; their home was all the world to them. Hallowed by a myriad associations, no wonder it was so; they were such simple people that they could see no higher destiny in life than to love God and keep His command-

ments. They did not separate the two ; as John said, there could not be love, whether earthly or heavenly, without obedience ; for love is a subtle thing. What we love, we shall become ; in a sense, it is a creative, if we love God—that is to say, in spirit and in truth—we shall become God, like unto God. God is love, and by it we were, and are, and shall be created in His image. They loved God, and so, according to their lights, they did as He commanded.

The farm was large, the land was good, if not beautiful in the eyes of the landscape-painter, and John Freeman found that it fully occupied his time. If he did his duty to his farm, he had little opportunity for meddling in affairs which were not, in the strictest sense, his own ; and it must be allowed he had as little taste for it. He had been brought up, as it were, alone ; he had been taught to believe, “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” in its most literal interpretation ; he had no ambition for interference, to manage or mis-manage the affairs of others. He knew his rights, or what he considered such, and stood by them as a bear stands by her whelps. It is not improbable that ere he would have

yielded one of them, he would have struggled to the death. He was scarcely litigious, nor, properly speaking, could he have been called pugnacious either; he would not provoke a quarrel, but he would certainly not shrink if another forced one on him. His desire was to live at peace with all men; he would trespass on no man's conscience, either spiritual or secular; on no man's rights, either immortal or mortal; but let any one trespass upon his, then for the sword of the Lord and of Gideon, and vengeance on His foes! His spirit was identical with that of the old Puritans; he would make a good citizen so long as he retained the rights of citizenship, but let them be taken from him, and he would never rest till he had them back again.

Exception should be made in one direction, perhaps; for in one matter, and in one alone, were his sympathies outside his farm; that was in the matter of church government. But to his mind, his home and his church, chapel, if you please, were one; he might not say so in so many words, but he thought so none the less. He lived for God. God was the sole essence and purpose of his being; right or wrong, according to his lights, there was not a

thought, a word, a deed in which God was not, and which was not for God; He was all and in all, omnipotent and omnipresent; God was in everything, and everything was for God to him. This being so, it was but natural that he should consider the two chief things or places in which God was as one, church and home. As naturally as his interests were centred in his home, so were they in his church; for home was church, and church was home. When he left his home he took it with him to his church, so that he was still at home; they were one and indivisible, both moving one way, with one end in view; both were bound to heaven, and heaven would be again his church and home as well; God was as present in his church and in his home as He was in heaven, so making them one part of the great whole; only here he saw Him with the eye of faith, and there he would see Him face to face.

The only difference, if difference there was at all, was that in his home he was alone, while in his church he was with many. In church the brethren met as in a common home; they prayed together and they praised together; they recognised the fact that they were

one family, big and little, strong and ailing. They were all equally interested and equally concerned, their common home was common to them all, that is, dear to all. As members of one family it behoved them to attend to family interests; he was a traitor to his family who was careless of those interests. This John Freeman certainly was not; they were his interests, and he was never careless of his own interests; nor were his brethren behind him in this respect: they moved together in one body, in the bonds of union, that they might with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

He was a deacon in his church, and respected in his office. At Daintree they are for the most part Congregationalists, Congregationalism being another legacy of Puritan independence, and the churches flourish as a green bay tree. And no wonder, when there are such men as John Freeman in the diaconate, for he was bound up, heart and soul—doing with his might what his hand might find to do—in the duties of his office. No grudging service was his, no carping spirit; the Lord, always the Lord, was in his thoughts. It was

not his own dignity, or his own convenience, but the dignity of the Lord, and His convenience. He gave liberally in the true sense of giving; the Lord gave him, that he always bore in mind; what credit was there to him in returning to the Lord His own?

“All that I have is of the Lord; if He hath need of what I have, is it not His own?” Such was the line of thought which guided him; that touchstone of the reality of a man’s religion found him true as steel; all his saving habits, all his unacknowledged love of money, fled when the Lord had need. Accustomed as he was to take Scripture as it stood, he did not forget that the apostle’s admonitions to charity had their pecuniary sense among the rest.

He was in much demand among the brethren in their assemblies for prayer; if John took the meeting, rest assured none went away without refreshment. Simplicity is the essence of religion; your refined subtleties hardly come from God; the Book has simplicity stamped on every page of it, he who runs may read; your casuist, who explains away passages which do not fall in

with his own views, might as well explain away his God. There is no line in Scripture difficult to understand if we would look at it as He would have us look. To hear some talk one would think Christianity was for the schoolman, for the splitters of straws. We have it in His own words that God has chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise. Not wisdom of the head is wanted, but wisdom of the heart, which is simplicity, that is the wisdom which is "more precious than rubies : and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her." John Freeman was no man of letters ; he was no more versed in scholarship than were Peter and Andrew, James and John, than all the rest of that noble company whom He made "fishers of men ;" but with the eye of faith and of simplicity he knew God, and God knew him ; therefore, to listen to his rough, rude, rugged heart, poured forth in all its intense earnestness to the common Father of us all, was better than all the hair-splittings of theology, and more acceptable to Him who heard—to Him whose every word is the perfection of simplicity, who thanked God, say-

ing, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes," who left us those words which are surely meant for our instruction, when, unto those disciples who rebuked the little ones, He said, "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven," than all the learning which the world can boast.

Thus John and Mary Freeman were a simple couple, perhaps old-fashioned too; but the love of God is the oldest-fashioned thing the world can show, but we think no worse of it for that; thus far they had journeyed through the years as husbands and wives were meant to do. Marriage was instituted before the Fall, when only blessings were, and who shall answer for it if we turn His blessing to a curse? They had borne their share of sorrows; they had known the heat and the burden of the day; they were approaching that valley wherein death is but a shadow; they awaited that glory which is at the end, with a faith which almost equalled Paul's. Night after night, as they knelt beside their bed in

prayer, the same sure hope filled the hearts of both, that, even as they had known each other here, they might be known hereafter. This is a comfortable state of mind—when we are old to know that God is near; to know that even as the race is almost run, so is the prize almost won. Well might John Freeman say—and Mary Freeman with him—“I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

But the end was not yet come, else had not these lines been written. There is another verse, a little further on, in Rom. xi., “Oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?” They were yet to know tribulation; they were yet to know that His ways are past finding out; they were to be faced with a difficulty of a kind which they had not bargained for. They were old-fashioned, and perhaps that had

something to do with it. It is somewhat strange how often trouble comes from the quarter from which it is least expected ; that which came to John Freeman was the hardest God could have given him to bear.

CHAPTER II.

SONS AND DAUGHTERS.

To the observant mind there are few things more surprising, few problems more difficult of comprehension, than the relationship of the parents to the child. This is not meant in its more obvious sense; we are quite aware of the very close degrees of consanguinity existing between the father and his son, and of the duties each owes the other. It is in a somewhat deeper sense we speak. Consider what the father is and what the mother is, consider their constitution and their character; and then consider what the children are. How often are we not forced to think that round pegs are in square holes? How often do we not find that the parent and his child are as ill-matched as they well could be? That they are in perfect contrast to each other? That what the one is is exactly what the other is

not ? That in character, tastes, genius, habits, they are as diametrically opposed as it is possible for two persons to be ?

It need not be pointed out that this is a weighty question ; it were well that we should all carefully consider it. We all have been children ; we either are, or, in the common course of nature, we shall be parents. Both positions are important ones in the sight of God. How often the Psalmist speaks of them ; how many of us bear in our hearts his words : “ Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord. . . . Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them ; ” and again those words of Solomon, “ Children’s children are the crown of old men ; and the glory of children are their fathers. ” Here is the relationship of parent and child distinctly spoken of as a blessing ; that of the parent is a happy one, that of the child is one of glory ; and undoubtedly, if the economy, which we call the world, is to continue, that relationship must be regarded as a blessing. If in any possible sense it can be considered as a curse, then the whole structure of Christianity, the whole fabric of the social system, which is the consequence of Christianity, must fall to rack

and ruin. Without hesitation it may be said that if the state, as a state, of parent and child can be proved in any sense to be one not to be desired, then we might as well give up our holy faith in Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and revert to the practice and practices of idolatry. But it cannot be proved. On the contrary, it can be shown that that intense love which fills a mother's heart, which moves a father as nought else can do, which causes us to regard a parent or a child as part and parcel of ourselves, is in complete harmony with—is, indeed, evidence of—the perfection of that plan which causes and compels nature in all her varied moods to bring forth fruit unto the Lord. At the same time, let us remember that it is a position which is not to be regarded lightly; it is our duty to understand all that it involves, to have a clear comprehension of its mutual responsibilities. Through either ignorance or carelessness we are liable to turn the blessing into a curse, and then are too apt to lay the blame upon the Lord. He never errs—we say it glibly with our lips, but we seem to doubt it in our hearts. If there is error, it is ours; let us be careful that we do not go astray.

Take the case of John Freeman and his wife. What sort of children do you suppose theirs would be? We have heard what the parents were—old-fashioned folk, unlettered, cast in a mould which is passing out of date, rooted to the ground because of the traditions of their fathers. Surely we should be able to forecast, with some probability of success, what the offspring of such a pair would be. Surely it would not be difficult to draw a fancy sketch of their sons and daughters which should not be so far out after all. This man might say: but God, we know, can raise up children unto Abraham out of stones, with the coarsest clay can produce the finest potter's ware; and not only can, but He does this, and that times innumerable.

The children of John and Mary Freeman were four, two sons and two daughters, and exactly what—generally speaking—the parents were, were the children. The oldest was John. He was a young man of some twenty-six or seven years, tall as his father in his tallest days, straight in the body as he had been; but there all resemblance ended.

John Freeman, the younger, was as certainly formed to rule, as others to be ruled. He had

a man's strength with a woman's gentleness ; he had a will of iron concealed in a manner of velvet. His was a face and form worth studying. His great height was well supported by great breadth, yet he had none of the awkwardness which we couple with giants. He had a natural grace, ease, and dignity ; nature had given him what we rightly call the signs of gentle breeding. His every movement was full of dignity. He could not move across the room without your thinking how in so doing his noble form showed to advantage. He was never rough or rude in what he did—he was never clumsy—he would never knock over four chairs in racing for the bell, he would never overturn his victuals on his neighbour's premises. If ever nature turned out that much-valued thing, a gentleman born and bred, she showed a fine specimen of her handiwork in him.

Nor was he mentally behind his physical standard. His face was a remarkable one ; its general expression was one of gravity, but smiles were by no means rare with him, and when one lit up his countenance you were persuaded that you had seldom seen a face more beautiful. Its dominant characteristic

was intellect, and the force and power of intellect; his eyes looked into yours with a keenness of penetration which feared nothing, and seemed to read you like a book; his forehead was broad and lofty, his nostrils were thin and almost femininely delicate, but his nose was bold and clearly cut, denoting courage and decision of character; his jaw was not unlike his father's, square and resolute, but without that something hard which made his father seem so stern.

You could not be in his company ten minutes without discovering that this man was an uncommon one. He was no great talker, but when he spoke his words were to the point, and always made the subject under discussion clearer than it was before. His voice was good to listen to; it was so clear and musical. If you did not see the speaker, you said at once—his is no common character. The range and variety of his subjects was astonishing; he was ready for you on every point; he never led you beyond your depth, but you found it very difficult to lead him out of his. He seldom broached abstruse questions, but he followed you in any you might suggest. He was a puzzle to you; he was so terribly

in earnest, and yet so calm. If the conversation grew to argument, he would lean his arms upon the table, his piercing eyes fixed right on you, his low tones clear and precise, yet thrilling with an eloquence you found it difficult to withstand; his influence upon his fellows was little short of wonderful. You started fully resolved to disagree with him in everything, primed to the muzzle with prejudice, wholly determined not to be convinced, but to differ from his conclusions, careless whether in your inner consciousness you thought them right or wrong. Such a state of mind is by no means uncommon in the combative conversationalist; it is not right or wrong he does battle for, but his own case; he prides himself on his powers of tongue, forgetful that the tongue is a weapon common to all fools, and that insane people gabble—gabble all day long—no matter if it is as clear as that the sun is in the sky that he argues against both right and reason; so afraid is he to own that he is wrong, that he ends by thinking the man his enemy who tries to set him right. Young Freeman's influence over one like this was indeed surprising; he

charmed while he convinced, he won your affections while he proved you wrong.

Whether you would or you would not, you esteemed him for his character. His was that subjective force—that resolution which never swerves—that combativeness which never strikes a blow, which always gains the end it has in view. The greatest force in the world, the surest, the most irresistible, is not the resisting but the enduring force. He who always strikes back at every one who strikes at him courts exhaustion, and with exhaustion comes defeat; but he who goes forward as if unconscious he has enemies on every side, first annoys, then surprises, then tires, then compels their respect, and with it victory. Which Character in all history has won, that is compelled, the universal respect and admiration, not only of believers but of sceptics too? Our Lord Jesus Christ. And by whom, and in whom was the principle of resistless non-resistance more clearly shown? Beyond doubt the completest victories were, are, and will be those in which not a blow was struck. There is a sublimity in endurance obvious to the rudest, the most besotted intellect.

Some such principle formed the key to

young Freeman's character. One perceived instinctively that this young man would swerve neither to the right hand nor to the left from the path which he had set himself to tread, that he would go straight as an arrow to the mark, and yet that he would neither shout nor bluster, that he would never run full tilt at obstacles bent on their destruction or his own, but that, with that patience which is in itself heroic, he would quietly set himself to remove them by the force of patience and the enduring power of his will. It is palpable that such a character is of the loftiest kind ; it was the character of the prophets, apostles, and martyrs. Indeed by such a character every great man has done his greatest deeds ; without it, in the truest sense of greatness, no man can be great. But let it not be imagined such a character is beyond the reach of any one of us ; on the contrary, it is within the reach of all. Every man can copy Christ ; we cannot all stand upon His pinnacle, but we can all approach the top of it ; we cannot all reach the loftiest heights of the Christ-like nature, but if we strive it is astonishing how near we can attain to them.

John Freeman the younger, by the mere

force of a character which he had cultivated to such a degree that it had become indeed remarkable, had already done great things. He had worked in the fields; he had done his father's bidding in all things; he had striven with any labourer of them all, and yet, over and above this daily and continually recurring occupation of his hands, he had found time to so store his mind with knowledge that now he need not have been ashamed to take his stand among any assemblage of scholars in the land. Of actual education, in the sense of schooling, his share had been but small; but even while at school he evinced an unmistakable desire for knowledge, which soon placed him above his fellows, not a few of whom seemed to think that the sole and special purpose of their being sent there was to lounge their time away. The schoolmaster was by no means underworked; make no mistake about it, few persons have a better right to compare themselves to the busy bee than the man the business of whose life it is to direct the march of intellect; nor was he in any special sense a learned man, but seeing the bent of his pupil's mind, and wishing to aid him to

the best of his ability when his schooling proper was finished, he lent him such books as he had at his command, and from them John Freeman drew fresh stores of knowledge, either at the first dawn of day or in the silent watches of the night. Having got all he could from those, he invested his pocket-money in the purchase of fresh treasures. Thus by degrees he gathered together a tolerable library, which was of more use to him than larger ones to many another, for he knew nearly every line in every book in it.

Two daughters came next, Mary and Alice, but these we shall not at this moment particularly describe, but pass on to the fourth child and second son, Oliver.

If, as the poet holds,

“A thing of beauty is a joy for ever,”

then Oliver Freeman was that thing. We each of us have our ideal man and woman, we each of us have a dim conception of the personality of the being who shall attain nearest to our notions of perfection. Certainly from one point of view, Oliver Freeman was well worthy of being the ideal of any one, for

in mere correctness of face and form he was so beautiful that the immediate feeling of the stranger who saw him for the first time was one of intense surprise. He was about twenty, and was younger rather than older than his years, though his desire was to be the other way.

The lad was a dreamer; he had what is called the "divine gift of poetry." Whether this be a gift to be desired, or at all times to be encouraged, is doubtful at the best. There is a great deal of nonsense talked about the "poetic faculty," nonsense which does more harm than good; it is not, or at any rate it is not chiefly, what we say and how we say it, but what we do and how we do it. Rely upon it, to make a poem out of life is much better than to make a poem out of words; there is a dangerous tendency accompanying the so-called poetic faculty,—a tendency to dream; above all things, let us steer clear of that. If once we forget that life means action, doing, it will go hard with us; the inclination to let existence slip by us as though it were one long dream, is the most awfully perilous state of mind which we can cultivate; it grows on us; like the clinging ivy, it is

beautiful, but, like that ivy, it robs and finally destroys him to whom it clings.

“Life is real, life is earnest.”

Take the poem from which that line is taken as the guide whose directions you are to follow, and poetry will have been some good to you at any rate. There is a great cry to-day for “Art,” and all which that word embraces. God forbid that we should say a word against it; it is a great teacher, and a great gift; properly used and properly understood, it may be made a help, as all His gifts were meant to be, and not a hindrance on the road to heaven; but beware of excesses. So surely as you make “Art” your idol, and it would appear as if not a few were in danger of so doing, as surely will it make you its fool. The author of “Songs of Two Worlds” has some beautiful lines which express our thought far better than we can do; he asks—

“Shall we too be led by that mirage of Art,
Which saps the true strength of the national heart?
The sensuous glamour, the dreamland of grace,
Which rot the true manhood they fail to replace;
Which at once are the glory, the ruin, the shame
Of the beautiful lands and ripe souls whence they came?”*

* These lines, which we ask no apology for quoting, are taken from *The Organ Boy*, a poem which in its integrity,

To such a query let our answer be negation. Art is a very enchantress, a very syren; she lures us on by her strange beauty, until, if we are not careful, the whole, in the most literal sense the whole, of our existence is devoted to her advancement. For such a purpose God did not send us into the world. Art is very well as our servant, but never let her be our mistress; we have only one mistress and one master, and that is God, whose servants undoubtedly we are.

Oliver Freeman would have been effeminately beautiful had it not been for the fire in his eyes, and the restless energy which made varied emotions pass across his face like clouds across an April sky. He was like quicksilver, never still; a state of quiescence seemed impossible to his nature. That stately calm which in his brother was such a sign of power, was incomprehensible to him. It was almost painful at times the unrest which mastered him. He was the creature of his

alike for suggestion, conception, and execution, is one of the most beautiful among these by which our language has been recently enriched. The whole volume, "Songs of Two Worlds," is full of many thoughts which we commend to the attention of the reader.

feelings; like the *Æolian* harp, sensitive to every changeful whisper of the gale.

“Why can I not keep still?” he would say in reply to some half-laughing, half-serious remonstrance of his brother’s, when some exceeding fit of restlessness made it appear as though he were half beside himself, “how can I tell?” and he would come and lean upon the table, and lay his hand upon his brother’s arm, and incline his face towards his, and with that strange witchery of manner, that subtle, passionate tenderness, that sweetly thrilling voice, which made it impossible to fall out with him. “Still?” he would repeat—and his language was in keeping with his mood—“how can I keep still? there is nothing still. The Lord has willed that nothing in the world shall be ever still. Nature is ever moving on, ever changing, and can I disobey the universal law? Jack, you sit here, you are always working, you are never still; why should you wish me to be what you are not?”

And, as though he had driven his brother into a difficult corner, he would stop and look at him with those rare eyes of his, which John never saw without becoming conscious of a curious qualm of tenderness—that tenderness

which is akin to pity—for there was pathos in their almost childlike earnestness.

“Ollie,” he would reply, and his deep voice had its charm too, as he called his brother by the endearing name, “there must be something wrong with your internal structure; you seize the shadow of a thought, but the substance never strikes you. It is a paradox, for while nothing is ever still, the greatest things are always still; the babbler tells his secrets, but the wise man holds his tongue; it is the nothings which make a noise, but the great deeds of nature, the revolutions of the spheres, the actions of the seasons, in whatever God evinces His mightiest and most mysterious sway, there is no noise then; it is only the loftiest forces which can move and yet keep still.”

Oliver would wait till he had finished, then would dart way, and pacing up and down the room, would reply in his own fashion—

“But if the universe were composed of nothing but the loftiest forces, where should we be then? The lark, which ever sings its song, ever mounting higher, higher, and is in no sense ever still, fills the place which it was

called to fill by God ; the leaves which ever whisper in the breeze are never still, but they are beautiful in the sight of God ; the brook, which unceasingly murmurs across the stones, is not its song acceptable to God ? Each of these is as He made them, and so, surely, is that man whose soul is full of harmonies which ever thrill, which ever tremble, which ever answer to the touch of the Great Player, who draws the sweetest music from the souls of men."

John would be silent. He knew that to argue with his brother was to run after a will-o'-the-wisp ; he generalised, he never gave you a fair issue on which to close with him, he left you in doubt as to what his own convictions were—if he really had any at all ; certainly, if he had been compelled to write them down on paper, he would have been at a loss to do it. His was no uncommon character ; it is one which many writers of books hold up to be admired. The reader of works of fiction for the present generation is familiar with the interesting hero, with restless gait, flashing eyes, and soaring imagination ; his language is fine, his ideals high. He is to be found in real life as well as in fiction ; but if we are to

regard such a character as heroic, then away with heroism for you and me. Make no mistake about it, he is a more than doubtful hero who stands in need of pity. We do not pity Stephen, we do not pity Paul, we do not pity those great ones who suffered for the truth. Earthly success or failure, in its more obvious sense, is of no account at all; we know that they earned their reward, but at the very best, pity is the acutest feeling which we can feel towards such a character as that.

Oliver Freeman was like a child; his was the most sensitive organisation possible, and like all such organisations, while he was affected by everything, he was affected by nothing long; he was incapable of self-control. It was vain to attempt to predict his mood from one hour to another; sustained exertion in any one direction was too much for him. He was enthusiastic, and while enthusiasm is all very well at times, it is like fire, a dangerous thing to trifle with; when the blood is at fever-heat it is too often a sign of fever, and fever is good for none. The enthusiastic temperament should beware how it gives way to its impulses. The enthusiast, like the madman, is apt to injure himself and his friends, even

the cause which he holds dear, to an extent which he regrets in vain when sanity returns.

Moreover, as was very well exemplified in the case of Oliver Freeman, enthusiasm, like boiling water, expends itself, and too often no more is left of the one than of the other; true, water generates steam, and steam works miracles, and so does enthusiasm if properly applied—the Apostles were enthusiasts in the most perfect sense of the word—but steam, if generated for no particular purpose, blows up the boiler, and so does harm; so with enthusiasm, it has a tendency to blow up its boiler, that is, to ruin the very end it desires to secure, and thus do all the harm which steam could do. With Oliver Freeman, as generally with the enthusiastic temperament, it always either blew hot or cold; he was either filled with a fiery determination to do or die, or else possessed by an overwhelming conviction that it was his destiny to die and never do, yet at present he had done neither. He was not dead, nor did he show any signs of dying, nor, in any special sense, had he done anything that was worth the doing.

He tilted at windmills. He was without an aim in life, which is the most melancholy

sentence we can pass on any one; for without an aim in life what is the use of living? Think a moment of all that life involves before you furnish a reply. In certain moods, doubtless, he would have denied the charge, saying that he had not one but many; in others, he would have bowed his head upon his hands, and allowed that it was true. Now granting that he was actuated by the very indefinite desire to do good to himself and others, to which all but the very worst subscribe, note that, though, when a "certain man drew a bow at a venture" he "*smote* the king of Israel between the joints of the harness," it was exceedingly probable that, having drawn his bow "*at a venture*," and not having, of deliberate purpose, *aimed* at King Ahab, that his shaft would not have struck the king at all, but gone purposeless on, and so been lost and useless; for His own purposes God directed that shaft, so that it smote the guilty king, but rest assured it is not in accordance with God's general rules of conduct, to speak reverently, to direct every aimless shaft in similar fashion. The mere fact of shooting implies an aim. What is the use of shooting without one? and of course an aim

implies a mark. "So fight I," says Paul, "not as one who beateth the air," and so ought we to live. It is a deplorable want the absence of a definite purpose or intention; it is a rock on which more lives have been wrecked than perhaps on any other. Let us live for something, and let us be sure what that something is. The higher our aim, the higher will our achievement be; only, when we have once chosen the mark at which we are to aim, go right on, "looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith," swerving neither to right nor left until the prize is won. No matter what your talents, your powers, your ambitions, remember always, if you are "unstable as water thou shalt not excel."

It was characteristic of Oliver that you could not but love him; you could not be angry with him; though you might blame him with your heart, with your lips you could not tell him so. The lad was so winning, so gentle, that at the worst you could but pity him; he was one with whom you might console, you could mingle your tears with his, and make his griefs your own, but the great sorrow which came into his face when he saw a frown upon your brow, disarmed you utterly, you could

not chide. But the strangest part of all was—and how often is it not so with others?—that despite the manifold weaknesses which were transparent to all who knew him best, he was ambitious; he seemed to have not the slightest doubt in his own mind, nor would he hesitate to tell you so, that his future was to be great, and grand, and glorious, and he was to make it so? He who was the creature of every changeful fancy! he who no more understood the real meaning of stability than if he had never heard the word! he who was no more master of himself than the ship is of the sea!—his future was to be great, and grand, and glorious! How it was to be he did not know, nor even in what sense it was to be; he was simply ignorant. He dreamed dreams than which none fairer were ever seen by mortal eye; he built castles in the air which were far grander conceptions than any architect could realise; but he did no more. The future was to him like an Eastern romance, full of beautiful things; like Tom Tiddler's ground, in which one has only to stoop to pick up gold and silver. Thus his brother and he were in complete contrast; with John everything was real, with him everything was shadowy; with

him, to-day was all for pleasure, to-morrow he would begin to work ; with John, since on to-day alone could he rely, he would make the most of that.

Oliver was not irreligious ; his religion was part and parcel of his character : as erroneous as his ideas of life ; dreamy and contemplative, instead of real and active ; he believed, but in his own way rather than in Christ's ; he might have been colour-blind, so little did he appear to see the spirit in which Christ would have had him take up His cross and follow Him ; he was great on faith. It is singular how many people, to the exceeding peril of their souls, read that striking chapter on faith, Hebrews xi., with Oliver Freeman's eyes. "I believe," said he ; "I believe in Jesus Christ and Him crucified." But he entirely overlooked the fact that it is not lip service God requires. To say that we believe is one thing, to show that we believe is quite another. God searcheth the heart ; practice, not precept, He asks us for.

Hebrews the eleventh was, of all chapters, the one Oliver loved best to read. "This faith," said he, "'which is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,' is mine, and by it I shall be saved ;" but

he forgot—and it is astonishing how many people we have found, people who, in the ordinary affairs to life, would not be inattentive either of the spirit or the letter of the bonds to which they place their names, in the same case—he forgot that faith is known by its fruits, and by its fruits alone. “By faith,” we are told, “Abel offered unto God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying to his gifts,” and then follows a long list of similar examples of the nature and fruits of faith, in every one of which the fathers of old time evidenced their faith by doing as He commanded, and inasmuch, and inasmuch only, as they did as He commanded, they perceived that they were faithful.

It is not necessary to point out how important it is that we should have a perfect comprehension of what this faith is of which so many of us boast, and how best we can evidence it by acting up to the spirit and the truth of His commands. We have here a family whose case may not be so very much unlike our own; we shall ask your attention in our attempt to follow them through one of those turning-points in life which may at any

day be ours. So far, the narrative has lagged, and we ask your forbearance for one chapter more, but after that we trust to take you on your journey with but little digression by the way.

CHAPTER III.

FAMILY MATTERS.

IT was the one desire of John Freeman the elder's life, that his sons should follow after him; to see them occupy the place which he himself now filled was all that he asked on earth. If possible, John should have the farm which he now held, and another should be got for Oliver in the near neighbourhood. Money should be no drawback; his wife had brought him a fair dowry; his father, whose only child he was, had left him something in hard cash; throughout his life he had been prosperous, the liberality with which he had given to the Lord had come back to him with interest; he had always been economical; he had nursed his money, so that now, for one of his class, he was a wealthy man. A prudent man, he had long decided how this wealth should be laid out. The Freemans might be primitive in the method of their testamentary dispositions,

but they were just, and their intentions were as clear as light. The girls were each to have a certain portion on their marriage day; they were to be provided with good husbands, and those husbands were not to receive them penniless. John was to have the reversion of the present farm—a good provision—and as much cash as might be left when Oliver had been provided for; another farm was, if possible, to be obtained for Oliver, and he was to have the command of a good round sum to enable him to stock it properly, and to put it into working order, for old Freeman was sufficiently abreast of the times to be aware that to a man without capital a farm was like a mill-stone which he might, by straining every muscle, drag along, but which would be a hindrance rather than a help to him.

Thus old John Freeman had the future laid out like a map before him. It never occurred to him that this was an unwise thing to do—that, at the best, it was a risky thing to resolve upon his own responsibility what a child should be or do. Such a course of action placed him very much in the position of a prophet, and as Paul trenchantly asks, “Are all apostles? are all prophets?” We may safely

agree to prophesy after the event, having left the issue to the Lord. But so had his fathers done, and as they did so would he. It had always been their custom to say what positions in life their children should occupy, and their children had occupied them as a matter of course; they were always used to be the arbiters of their children's fortunes, and the children had passively agreed to their deliberations. So far as John Freeman knew his family history—and few could have known it better—there was no single instance in it of a rebellious child. It never entered into his philosophy to think that the traditions of the past might not be the practice of the future; he never imagined, in this respect, that the days which were, were now no more; still less did he perceive that the education of these modern days was putting into his children's hands a power which they had never held before.

His sons should be farmers, his daughters should marry the husbands of his choice. He was shrewd enough to see that his lads were not the lads of his boyhood, and he was glad of it; he was proud of them; they were to him as the apple of his eye. He loved them with a

love the strength of which he was himself unconscious. This old man, outwardly so stern, was the tenderest soul alive; his love was of the old-fashioned sort, strong as his own life. "Bless the Lord, O my soul," was his continual cry, "and forget not all His benefits;" and chief among these were his children, his sons and his daughters—they were indeed to him "an heritage of the Lord;" he was indeed the happy man who had his quiver full of them. This strange old man was unimaginative in all things but one; his children were the one dream of his life, they were to be the crown of his old age, and the glory of their father. They were as dear unto him as his own soul; the thought that they should stand as a united family before the throne of God was rapturous in the extreme—the bliss of that imagining was beyond the power of speech to tell. How often to his wife—who was the only human being from whom no hope of his heart was hid—would he dwell upon the exceeding loving-kindness of the Lord in giving them such boys and girls!

"Ah, wife!" he would say, "how has the Lord been good to us? There are no lads in the neighbourhood like ours—none better and

truer. How wise at their books they are! Mark me, my lass! they'll be better farmers than ever their father was."

And his wife would look at him and never say a word. She had that feminine instinct by which the average woman sees farther than the average man. She saw what he did not see, and it was like a load upon her heart, for she dared not tell him what she saw. Dared not tell him? She knew—none better—that such a tale as she could tell would be the bitterest he could hear, and she would not pain him. She had no certain data on which to base her facts, but in her own mind she felt convinced that what the father wished was exactly the contrary of what the children wanted. Once she had hinted at some such possibility, but he had spoken to her in a way which made it impossible for her to attempt the task of enlightening him again. The old man saw what he wished to see; and every one who had not his eyes was as an enemy. The only occasion throughout their livelong lives on which anything approaching an unkind word had passed from him to her was when she tried to show him that what he saw did not exist in fact, but was a delusion of his senses.

“ He is a good lad, John,” he would observe, “ a right good lad ; and his head is well placed upon his shoulders. He has more sense in his little finger than some have in their heads and body too. He sees as far into a thing as any one, and knows what he is talking of. ‘ He trusts in God,’ ” said the old man with a chuckle, repeating a saying which is well known in those parts, “ ‘ and keeps his powder dry.’ He’ll never need be told that poverty comes as ‘ one that travelleth,’ and ‘ want as an armed man.’ When he gets the farm into his own hands he’ll make a goodly thing of it, for though he knows better than to say so to his own father, young one though he is, he could teach me better than I could teach him.”

Still Mary Freeman would never say a word. She would let the old man talk on, his pipe in his mouth, and contentment on his brow. She had a shrewd suspicion that very possibly this was so. She had a clearer notion of her son’s acquirements than his father had ; but she greatly doubted if his ideas as to how those acquirements would best be used at all coincided with his father’s.

“ As to Oliver,” the farmer would go on—

who, to speak truth, had no more real comprehension of Oliver's character than the babe unborn,—“he is young as yet; but he'll grow older before he's done,” and again his features relaxed into a smile, as though the notion of his growing older were a joke. “He's a bonny boy is Oliver, and quick at seeing things. He'll not be blind for want of spectacles to help him see. He's a trifle light—he's not his brother John, but he'll sober in a while, and be as steady as any one.” Then, after a pause, “Sometimes,” said he—and his tone was a more contemplative one—“I think that Oliver is like Benjamin; nigh fifty years was I when he was born, so that the Lord sent him to me in mine age. He is a winsome lad; ay, John is dear to me, and so is Oliver dear too.”

He might have added, had he in this matter spoken out the fulness of his heart, that Oliver was dearer to him than was John, dearer to him in another sense than John. Nor, perhaps, might this be wondered at; it is the way with the Oliver Freemans of the world, to endear themselves to the hearts of those who love them in a particular sense and a special degree. The strong instinctively lean towards

the weak, though the weak by no means necessarily lean towards the strong; and this because while the really strong man in his heart of hearts must be conscious of his strength, it is the peculiarity of a weak one that, while others may read him like a book, he himself is blind to his own weakness. Thus is the eternal law of compensation brought to bear by God: "We then that are strong," again to quote St. Paul, "ought to bear the infirmities of the weak;" this is commanded by God, and we know that this spirit was Christ's in its most sublime perfection; but it is also implanted in our nature; it is peculiar to man, being the outcome of that civilization which is synonymous with Christianity. The beasts of the forests consider the mere fact of weakness a sufficient pretext for them to prey on and slay the weaker members. We take the exactly contrary view, considering it ample and sufficient cause for us to take our weaker brethren into our immediate and near protection; we long to shield the weak, and God be thanked that it is so, and the strong are proud to think that the weak are their especial charge.

John Freeman was getting an old man now, and he knew it as well as any one; he did not

try to blink the fact, it never entered into his thoughts to do it. The beauty of old men is the grey head, and with him so it was indeed. He was glad in his old age; it was meet that as the years went on they should lie heavy on his head, but there was no repining for his youth. The days of his pilgrimage had been many and long, the heat and the burden of the day had nearly gone, and now it was a good thing and righteous before the Lord that he should lay down the sceptre he had wielded, that he should yield up his place in the bustle and the battle and the strife to those who should be able to fill it better than he could now.

Such a thought had been some time in his mind; not that he was so far gone in years as to be entirely in the sere and yellow leaf; not so, he was still hale and hearty. Constitutionally strong, his mode of living had not been of that kind which rots the muscles and dries up the springs of life; but no matter how a man may live, when he has nearly reached threescore years and ten, the best of his travelling days are done, and the coming event casts its shadows before. Only one thing more he desired to see done, and then might he say with John: "He that testifieth these things

saith, Surely I come quickly ; Amen. Even so come, Lord Jesus." Only one more earthly ambition had he still remaining, and then all his ambition would be for the Lord. It was a commendable one ; he wished to set his house in order, he wished to see his children filling the places they were to fill, before he went to

"That undiscovered country,
From whose bourne no traveller returns."

He wished to see those whom he loved fairly set out on their ways through life.

"Wife," he said one evening to Mary Freeman, one evening when the sky was heavy with thick clouds—nature was in one of her moods of gloom—and the world seemed dull and heavy. They had been sitting in silence for some time when he broke the stillness in a way which rather startled the gentle woman at his side,—“Wife, I must set my house in order.” She started. The words meant more to her than they did to him. She knew what a setting in order that was like to be. She waited to see what might be coming next. “I feel that the Lord is near at hand. It has come upon me lately that I’ll not be long from home,” and the old man passed his weary hand across his weary brow, but she said never a

word. “ ‘ The days of our years are threescore years and ten,’ eh, my lass ? ‘ and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow ; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.’ If the Lord so wills, let fourscore years be mine ; but it has come to me, my girl, that I am very near the Lord, and the Lord is very near to me.”

He paused, but still she never spoke a word. She knew no fear lest he should die, nor did he know any fear of death. That thought, which we cannot have too clearly in our minds, was a very present help to both of them :

“ There is no Death : what seems so is transition—
 This life of mortal breath
 Is but the suburb of the life elysian,
 Whose portal we call Death.”

They would not long be divided ; in any case that portal would scarcely have closed on him before it opened too for her. She had no fear of death. That is a very grateful hymn which runs—

“ Now the labourer’s task is o’er,
 Now the battle-day is past ;
 Now upon the farther shore
 Lands the voyager at last.”

It was another thought which troubled her,

and as he continued that thought grew heavier still.

“ I must have some talking to the lads and lasses, and must tell them what I think to do. It is time that they should know that which I have planned for them. John is seven-and-twenty years of age—seven-and-twenty, and it would be well for him to have the farm, that I may see him flourish as a green bay-tree when my time is come; and he'll be a good farmer will our John, better than ever his father was; he'll not shame those who have gone before. The Freemans ever have been apt tillers of the soil, but he'll be better than them all. He's a good lad, our John. The Lord has been very good to us; he's been a right good son to me.”

He paused, as if wearily; it had been a hot day, and the old man was worn out with labour. When he spoke again, Oliver was the subject of his thoughts.

“ He's ower young is Oliver, ower young to take the full burden of a farm; experience will do no harm to him, and he'll learn more from John than any one I know. I've spoken to Robert Anson; he's giving up his farm when the lease is out, 'tis a good piece of land,

to the full as good as ours, and Oliver shall have the lease of it. It will be a great start for him. If he sticks to it as a man should do, and the Lord blesses the labours of his hands, there 'll be no farm, save John's, in all the country that can compare to it. They're good lads, both of them; they've been good sons to me, and they're dear unto my heart. But I must tell them, wife," rousing himself to speak with odd energy, "I must tell them, it'll be too late ere long, 'for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not,' and I must be ready."

Mary Freeman, because of the fear which was in her heart, said something which was meant to comfort him; but he, not knowing her fear, knew not that he stood in need of comfort, and did not perceive the full meaning of her words.

"Fear not, my man," said she, "all will be well. He is our Shepherd, and we shall not want. He has been very good to us throughout the years, and His loving-kindness faileth never."

"Ay," said he, and the twenty-third Psalm came from his lips almost unconsciously. "'The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He

maketh me to lie down in green pastures : He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul : He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me ; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies : Thou anointest my head with oil ; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life : and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.'” And at the words, “I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever,” the looks of weariness passed from his face, and it was filled with an exceeding peace ; and Mary Freeman said, “ Amen !”

But her woman's instincts were right, and his were wrong. The wish with him had been father to the thought, and what he had hoped would come he had said would come ; but he had reckoned without his host. The fault, if fault there were, was the fault of his education. And if a man, a man of strong resolution, is trained in a particular groove, if through boyhood, manhood, and old age he still goes where that groove leads him, it

becomes practically impossible for him at this late period of his life to grow out of that groove and start again in a new direction ; it is the old story of training a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he not only will not, but practically cannot, depart from it ; and this applies not only to the way in which he should go, but to the way in which he should not go also. When a tree is but a sapling it yields readily to your hand ; when the clay is damp you can mould it into any shape, but when you have once formed your pot, and baked it in the fire, you can break it, but only by so doing can you change its shape again. Thus with old John Freeman ; he was in many respects a man of one idea, that idea had been his father's, and now you might as well hope to change his fathers as alter him. He had decided what his sons' walk in life should be, decided, indeed, before his sons were born ; and as it had never entered into his philosophy to imagine but that their wishes could be the duplicates of his own, so it had never occurred to him to discuss the future with them in order to learn what their ideas respecting it might be ; so had his fathers done, and so would he.

But with the sons it was altogether different. Let it at the opening be understood that they loved their father every whit as much as he loved them; they had been and were good sons—he spoke from actual knowledge when he thanked the Lord for that. John respected his father and loved him too. He would not have been young John Freeman had he not seen and esteemed the simple and patriarchal beauty of the old man's life and character.

“I know no one,” he was wont to say, “who is like my father. He is a model of the Christian character, and if we were all like him, I think we should all certainly be of the ‘innumerable company of the angels.’ The Proverbialist said truly that ‘the glory of children is their father.’ I am prouder of him than of anything in the world.”

It is one thing to admire, to esteem a man, quite another to agree with him—at any rate to that extent that we are willing to give up our preconceived notions to fall in with his. We should not hastily conclude that this is unfortunate; we know and we are told that there are diversities of gifts; two men may differ, yet both be right; it is sufficient that we covet earnestly the best gifts. Let us

be assured in our own minds of the truth, let us search diligently until we find it. There are certain things written for our learning which no man can mis-read, "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think upon these things;" but let us remember that one dead level of agreement on things non-essential we shall never have until that great day of the Lord shall come. Paul says very plainly, "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations," for it is more doubtful even than the disputations if from such much good can come.

Thus, though while John Freeman esteemed and loved his father, he differed from him on many points, we must not therefore conclude that because one was right, the other was necessarily wrong. They simply saw with different eyes. It might be said that one saw with the eyes of tradition and sentiment, while the other saw with the eyes of reason. On two points young John was quite clear in his own mind. In the first place, he

was persuaded that at present in England the calling of the agriculturist was not one to be desired ;¹ in the second, he was very sure that such a calling was entirely unsuited to his tastes and his ambitions.

He was actuated by a desire to be a benefactor of his kind. This is a desire not uncommon among promising young men ; but as a rule it suffers from the disadvantage of indefiniteness ; but with him this was not the case, his desire was sufficiently definite. His mind was mathematical, exact ; vagueness was no sin of his ; above all things, he was practical.

He had an astonishing love for science ; from his earliest years it had had for him an irresistible attraction ; with delight he perceived that of all wells of knowledge, science was the deepest and most wonderful, but with astonishment, as he dipped deeper and deeper into it, he discovered the spirit in which so many seem to enter on its study. It is generally supposed that the first characteristic

¹ Let it be distinctly understood that this opinion is neither defended nor attacked by us ; in this place we decline to have an opinion upon such points at all. In these pages we are simply attempting to attain to a clear comprehension of certain principles, the clear comprehension of which is necessary to the Christian life and character.

of a student is humility, that the spirit in which he enters on his study is one of reverence; but in some instances it would seem that this is not the case. It would appear that some think the characteristic of a student should be pride, and that of the most perverted kind; that study is synonymous with dogmatism; that science is not to instruct them, but they are to instruct science. Before all things John Freeman was a Christian, and he was amazed to learn that some scientists so-called, instead of regarding science as the hand-maid of Christianity, seemed to look upon it as a weapon put into their hands to knock it down. Here was the Athenian altar set up again! "For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, To THE UNKNOWN GOD." And this in the nineteenth century! this after the great tragedy of Calvary! this after the story of the years! this after the plain evidence of the finger of God in every page of the history of the world since then! Young John Freeman was amazed; was this what science was to bring us too? Then what he understood by science was a very different thing. He looked abroad, considered the science of history, and saw as

plainly as that the sun is in the sky that what has given our dear native land its place among the nations is and has been the faith of the great body of the people in Jesus Christ and Him crucified; that when that faith was great and showed brightest among the nations, so their prosperity was great; but when that faith sank low, so the sun of their prosperity sank low. He needed no hair-splitting, no casuistry of the scientists to show him this, and he was seized with that spirit which Paul has put into deathless words: "Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you. God that made the world and all things, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us; for in Him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also

of your own poets have said, For we are also His offspring."

To do this John Freeman resolved should be the great purpose of his life; at seven-and-twenty he decided that the great object of his life should be to say unto these wise men, with Paul, who, bear in mind, had sat at the feet of Gamaliel, and was in each and every sense the wisest of them all—"Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you." As at present advised he had no intention of entering the ministry. It is a great mistake to suppose that it is necessary to do that to bear witness to the truth of God. He intended to speak with a layman's voice, and of a practical, work-a-day layman too.

He had made the acquaintance of one of the heads of a great shipbuilding firm in London, and had so favourably impressed that gentleman with his abilities that he had lately received a very inviting offer to accept a position on their staff; it was doubly inviting in his eyes, for at heart he was an engineer. It was a profession than which he esteemed none worthier; and a more favourable opportunity of making it his own was not likely to occur. It was a position which he valued,

first, because it would give him special and increased opportunities of adding to his store of knowledge ; second, because it was work he loved ; and third, because it would enable him to share his home with Oliver.

For Oliver still less than himself had no thought of making his father's case his own. The dreamy, castle-building lad could not but think of farming with a shudder. It was too real for him. That bright mirage which he called the future was full of beautiful things, and farming had nothing beautiful for him. He was to take high place among the great ; he was to win name and fame. Wealth he cared nothing for ; he was to hand down his name to future generations as one which they should love and cherish. He was actuated by the same desire as was John, to be the benefactor of his kind ; but while one's notion of a benefactor was clear and real, the other's was vague and visionary. Soldiers, poets, senators, these were the heroes of Oliver's imagination ; he was only at a loss when he came to think which was the worthiest of the three ; a judicious mixture he rather favoured in his more contemplative moods ; but whether he was to be one or all, he was to be the greatest

of his kind. Such a view of life would be ridiculous were it not so perilous to him who holds it, and yet it is more common than might at first appear; it is by no means unusual to meet a young man who regards life rather as a vision than a reality. What statistics those would be which would give us the number of careers which have been ruined on that account!

To stay at home was to Oliver a thought insufferable. Not that he did not love his home; he did, and all beneath its roof. It was his proudest ambition to come back to it, laden with honours, and crowned with laurel wreaths; but he could not realise his hopes there; when he had realised them was the time for him to stay at home. The world, the wide world, was the place for him; it should be his oyster-shell, which he would open with the sharp knife of his genius. How it was to be done he was not quite clear; that it was to be done he had long made up his mind. Had it not been for John, he would have declared his intentions ere now; when he left school, had it not been for his brother's influence, he would have told his father that a farmer's life was not a life for him.

John, who knew him so well, supposed that he would change his mind in this as in all other things; but it is characteristic of weak-minded people that they are obstinate as well; he was as firmly resolved to try his fortune in the world at twenty as he had been at ten.

“If,” said John to him, when he found that he was bent on having his own way, “you had any notion what you meant to do, my objection would be less, but you have none. You have no idea what you mean to do, or how you mean to do it. Ollie, you are nothing but a child, and every bit as headstrong. Be careful; it is a dangerous adventure you are entering on, to set out upon an unknown sea without a rudder.”

“Never fear for me,” returned the other, throwing back his head with that sunny laugh of his; “you wait and see the wonders I shall do. I have some poems in my desk; but wait until you behold them in all the magnificence of print. Not that I rely upon my poems only, not I; I’m not so foolish as all that, but they’re the thin end of the wedge; just wait till I’ve got my poems in, and then I’ll get myself in afterwards.” And he laughed again, perhaps at his own conceit—a laugh which

pained John, even while he smiled at his brother's merriment.

“Ollie,” said John,—and seeing that he spoke very gravely now, Oliver came and knelt on the floor by his brother's side, and John laid his hand gently upon his head, for they were dear to each other, and no one could help but be affectionate to Oliver,—“You foolish boy, did you never read of that rich man who, because his ground brought forth so plentifully, dreamed dreams for the future? or of that house which was builded on the sand? In the one case the Lord came and said, ‘Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee;’ in the other, ‘The rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell.’ Do you think that either of these parables applies to you?”

“Jock,” said Oliver, and his voice was very sorrowful, “don't preach to me; I know that I am wrong and you are right, but I cannot bear to have your sermons aimed at me.”

Such an exclamation has come from other lips as well as his; we are, each one of us, too ready to say, “I cannot bear to have your sermons aimed at me; but my neighbours, ah! you can aim at them just as you please.”

CHAPTER IV.

*JOHN FREEMAN THE ELDER EXPLAINS
HIS PLANS.*

AT last John Freeman the elder told his children what he meant to do for them, and so put, as he had it, his house in order. The occasion was one which, in the lives of none of them, could ever be forgotten, nor was it the less memorable because so wholly unexpected.

It was one Sunday evening, an evening in early August. The Lord's Day had been a resplendent one; Nature had put on her most gorgeous garb to do honour to the Day of Rest, and now, in the calm of the sunset hour, the glory of the Lord was over earth and sky. The heat, which had been almost oppressive, was tempered by a cool, refreshing breeze; it was that comfortable season when the day, having all but run its course, meek, and mild, and gentle, bows its head to greet the evening

hour. The dust, which had been conspicuous in all the country lanes, was for a while at rest; the birds, as if conscious that this was the day when all should unite in praise, carolled their evening hymn with throats that seemed to burst with song; the trees, the flowers, the fields of glowing grain, with heads inclined, joined in Nature's universal evening prayer.

The services were all over, the quiet streets and shady lanes were alive with people returning from communion with the Lord. It was a sight to do one good to see. The simple country folk, dimly conscious of the unspoken music which glorified the evening hour, with lowered voices and radiant eyes passed homewards two and two. It seemed a sin to raise their tones, as if to do so would be to sacrilegiously jar upon the voiceless prayer which rose on every side to heaven. At such a moment none could be unhappy; of what kind would that man be who at such an hour could not find something for which to add his praises to the universal psalm?

The Freemans were returning from chapel along the lane which branches off the London Road when you have passed the cemetery—a

pleasant lane in summer-time, for the hedges grow above your head; at their base are grassy banks, whereon, in spring, are primroses, pinks, and red and yellow violets, lilies, cowslips, pimpernels, and all the pride of wayside flowers, and on which, if you are wearied, you may recline and rest; while overhead here and there the lime-trees meet in a triumphal arch of flashing, quivering greenery. In these same limes the cuckoo loves to make free with some weak brother's nest, and give the note to summer in his mellow tongue; here too the nightingale, when wrens and finches, and the bold cuckoo have sunk to rest, steals on silent wing and chants to the night her love-lorn song. This is indeed the very metropolis of birds. Across the field, in the topmost branches of the belt of elms, the glossy rooks, in coats of more than funereal blackness, caw and chatter, as though all the world were interested in their small affairs; sometimes some solitary member of the tribe sets out on melancholy wing, and fills the air with wailings loud and long, but whether it is because his heart is sad, or the ingratitude of his fellows, "more strong than traitors' arms," has cut him to the soul, no man can tell; the listener only knows that it



“John Freeman and his wife, her arm in his, went on before, speaking little by the way, while the lads and lasses, in straggling fashion bringing up the rear, were almost as silent as their parents.”—Page 81.

is not pleasant to hear him give such emphatic utterance to his wrongs.

John Freeman and his wife, her arm in his, went on before, speaking little by the way, while the lads and lasses, in straggling fashion bringing up the rear, were almost as silent as their parents. It was hardly the season for much talk; silence was more in harmony with the spirit of the time; a contemplative mood stole on them unawares, and as they walked each thought of many things.

It had been a striking sermon; it had been well chosen so as to have a special application to such a day. The preacher had chosen for his text Christ's words when He sat by the well-side in the fair country of the Samaritans,—“Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already to harvest.” The full spiritual meaning of the words had been brought well home to his hearers' hearts, and not a few of his congregation pondered them as they walked homewards by the way. They lifted up their eyes and saw that the fields were white unto the harvest. They remembered, too, that “he that reapeth receiveth wages;” but it was a matter for their own consideration whether he also “gathereth

fruit unto life eternal," though they were very sure, from the simple evidence of their own harvest-homes, that both he that soweth and he that reapeth rejoice together. But the higher spiritual meaning chiefly commended itself to old John Freeman's mind—"Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already to the harvest;" ay, was he not one of the fields? was he not white already to the harvest? "Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe." He could not doubt that the day of the Lord was nigh, that the reaping was close at hand, and after that but the garnering remained. The persuasion that this was so turned his thoughts into other channels, and prompted the utterance of them to his wife.

"My lass," said he,—it was odd how he always addressed her as though she still were young; perhaps, in his eyes, hers was the secret of perpetual youth,—“my lass, did you mind what the preacher said? Did you mind that he said that the harvest was at hand? I've prided myself through all my days to think that when the corn was ready so was I, and it won't do that I should be found wanting now. When the Lord comes

He must find me in all things ready. I must no longer put off until to-morrow what I can do to-day. 'Tis the Sabbath too, and such a Sabbath-day as, very like, I shall not see again. There has not been one like it all this summer. I'll have the lads and lassies in when we've had supper, and tell them all there is to tell. It is the chiefest thing which I have to do, and it is fit that I should do it on the Lord's chief day."

But though he ceased, his wife said never a word. That sermon had been a comfortable one to her, and her thoughts had been with the fields of golden grain which were all ready for the Lord. Two stalks were they, she and her man John, and if the Great Reaper reaped them both with one stroke of His sickle, it would indeed be pleasant in her sight. But old John's words sent her heart down low, and she fell trembling. She clung tighter to his arm, but she never spoke: seeing which the old man went on.

"Ay, it is time that I should tell them all; they have a right to say that I should speak, for though I go they stay behind, and I would not have them say when I am gone, that because I did not tell them my mind in time

they knew not what it was; the Lord must find me ready. 'Be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh;' and it would ill become me to make excuses. Lads and lasses! ay, I mind the day when my father told me what he would have me do, and I mind the Scripture which he read; it was Matthew xxv., the parable of him who 'called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods;' and I mind how he read the words, with his finger on the page, slowly, word by word; he was no great reader, and he never loved to hurry in the reading of the Word. 'After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.' He stayed before he read that verse, and looked at us. 'And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.' Ay! how he looked at us then! and then, when he came to that part, 'Then he which had received

the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine;' and the Lord's reply, 'Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth,' he closed the Book, and looked at us with all his eyes, and then he prayed. I mind that he prayed that we should not be unprofitable servants, but that we might return the talents which were now committed to our charge with interest when the great reckoning of the Lord should come. Ay, my lass!" and the old man sighed; "and that was nigh five-and-forty years ago, and I remember it as though it were but yesterday, and it is now my turn to distribute my goods unto the lads and lasses."

That supper was a quiet meal; no one was in a mood for much conversation. The old man was thinking of the scene which was to follow, and was happy in the thought; this was to be the crowning evening in his life; the talents which had been committed to his charge he was to recommit, with interest,

to those who should come after him. The reckoning was near, and he rejoiced to know that ere long he must render his account; almost could he hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Such a thought must be very pleasant to whomsoever it may come.

His wife too was looking forward to the scene which was to follow, but her anticipations were very different to his. It is a good thing when a woman's anxiety for those she loves evinces itself outwardly in plainer evidences of her love. This old-time dame was very fearful in her heart; the glory of her day threatened to be shadowed, not crowned at eventide, but she would suffer none of those she loved to discover the alarm which filled her bosom, for she thought that if they saw it they would suffer too; so she was even more tender than was her wont. She ministered to their wants with more observant eyes. There was a smile on her gentle face, because she feared that there was a shadow upon theirs; in a sweet cunning way no pen could well describe, she strove to acquaint

them with the courage and contentment which were for the time unknown to her. What pen of a ready writer can fitly paint the gentle tenderness which animates a woman after God's own heart even in her age? It is stronger than a man's strength, weaker than his weakness, and of all gifts it is the one the most to be desired by her kind; for if a woman is to be a helpmeet for man, and so over and over again we are told that it was ordained, then surely it is a blessed thing and holy in His sight that she should help him in life and death, in his joys and in his sorrows, for it is amazing how great is a woman's strength in the way of helping. No tongue of poet, no voice of wisdom, no cry of eloquence could conceive a more perfect, glorious, and acceptable epitaph to be placed upon a woman's grave by the partner of her life than the words which, in their highest sense, are the attribute of Deity: She was "a very present help in time of trouble."

Supper being finished, the old man said,—

"My lads and lasses, I have something to say to you this night which you should hear. We'll have a hymn, and after that is done

I'll tell you what it is, and then it is meet that we had prayers."

The two lads looked at each other, but said no word; the sisters, too, exchanged a glance, but as it was Mary's duty, she being the elder, to accompany the hymns, she rose at once and went to the harmonium; the mother looked at them all, first at the children, then at the father, and in her face were blended the most distinct emotions; there was a smile about her tender lips, but it found no welcome in her eyes, for in them was a sort of fright, and the wrinkles on her worn brow worked with an agitation which was strange to her.

The hymn which old John Freeman chose for some reason of his own was John Henry Newman's "Lead, kindly Light." What connection there was between its sentiment and that special occasion did not appear upon the surface, but it had always been a favourite of his own since he had heard it first, and now perhaps the thought that that "kindly Light" did lead him on, and the time was close at hand when there should indeed be light, was sweet unto his soul. Be that how it may, it were a goodly thing to hear them sing. John stood by the harmonium; his voice was rich

and mellow ; sunny Oliver, who had the gift of song, and loved music perhaps as much as anything in all the world, stood by his mother's side—youth and age—and looked over the book she held, not that he needed it, for he knew the words by heart ; brown-eyed, grave, sedate Alice had slipped one arm through her father's, and read from the large-type copy it needed both his hands to hold. They lifted up both hearts and voices, they sang with one and with the other, and a very flood of melody ascended to the King of kings. The last rays of the setting sun shone through the luxuriant creepers which framed the window in a frame of many flowers, and without it seemed as though everything were still with an intensity of silence, so that the plainer might the song be heard. None could doubt that the fair words were fitted to the fair time.

“Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on.
The night is dark, and I am far from home,
Lead Thou me on.
Keep Thou my feet ; I do not ask to see
The distant scene ; one step enough for me.

“It was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou
Shouldst lead me on ;

I loved to choose and see my path ; but now
 Lead Thou me on.
 I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,
 Pride ruled my will ; remember not past years."

When they came to the last verse their voices insensibly softened. How the hearts of the two older folk must have echoed the opening words ! by the time it was done the woman's eyes were wet with tears ; her soul was filled with many thoughts, and the few words seemed to contain them all.

"So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still
 Will lead me on
 O'er moor and fen, o'er crags and torrent, till
 The night is gone ;
 And with the morn those angel faces smile,
 Which I have loved long since and lost awhile."

There was silence at the end, no one moved and no one spoke. Mary's hands lay lightly on the keys, and the last note died mournfully away ; Oliver's intensely sympathetic nature was touched to the quick, and the thought that the tears were in his mother's eyes almost brought them into his ; old John Freeman's head was bowed, and his hand was on the Book ; Alice's arm was now about his neck, and her cheek pillowed upon his shoulder ; John stood motionless by the harmonium, the

hand holding the hymn-book had fallen to his side ; perhaps his thoughts were the deepest of them all.

“Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on.”

Ah ! and might it not only lead him on, but all other men as well ; he applied the spirit of the prayer not to himself alone, but to all the world beside.

It was Mrs. Freeman who was the first to break in upon the silence ; quitting Oliver’s side, she rose and bustled round the room.

“Come, father,” she said, and her tones were cheery, “thou know’st ’tis getting late, if thou’st aught to say hadst not better say it, for in a while the lads and lasses will be going to their rooms ?”

“Ay, wife,” and the old man roused himself out of his dream, “I’ll say it now ; take thy seat, John, and let’s see thy face.”

John did as he directed ; they all sat down. The scene was not without a touch of oddity ; the young men and women sat on four chairs before their father as if they were children called up in school. Oliver, who was nearest the table, rested his arm upon the board, and

fixed his glorious eyes upon his father; he was in one of his solemn moods, but in spite of his solemnity there was a curious look of childishness in his boyish face. Mary sat next; hers were Oliver's eyes, and something of the sunshine of his countenance, but without that look of weakness which, to the judicial eye, was traceable in every line of her brother's face. Alice next, strong and trusting, with something of that tenderness which was her mother's charm. Then John, with his legs crossed, his hands resting on his knees, leaning back in his chair so that his head bent slightly forward; his expression was one of patience, he simply waited without anticipating by so much as a glance what his father might have to say. Facing them, on the other side the table, were their father and mother—the mother, in her great wooden arm-chair, with her hands folded in her lap, was the most disturbed of all, though she did her best to hide it. Old John had drawn his chair close to the table; he had in his hand his spectacles, which he had drawn from their aged shagreen covering; wiping them carefully he perched them on his nose, and looked at his sons and daughters.

“My lads and lasses,” he began, “you mind.

the Scriptures, how a certain man had two sons, and divided unto them his living; and you mind too that other Scripture, when Isaac blessed Jacob, who deceived him in his old age. I am an old man, my years are nigh three score years and ten, and it is fit that I should divide my living, and give my blessing unto my sons and daughters. It would not be seemly that I should put off my preparations for departure until departure came. You have been good sons to me, and goodly daughters. I thank the Lord always in that He has endowed me so richly with His blessings."

He paused; there was silence, nor did any speak until he had made an end of speaking. The perfect calm of eventide penetrated to the room within, and save the old man's voice there was no sound; in that small circle there was a common feeling moved them all—reverence for their father.

"John," continued the old man, turning to his first-born, "I design that you shall have the farm." John never spoke a word; strong man though he was, he could not for his life have offered a remonstrance then. "Thou art a good son, John; thou art a good son unto thy father, thou hast a good head upon thy

shoulders ; thou knowest the Lord, to keep His commandments. Follow on as thou hast begun, and I do not doubt but that thou wilt do well. It was my father's farm, and his father's in his time. It is as though the Lord had given it unto the Freeman's, to be their heritage for ever. I charge thee to administer it righteously in His sight. Be no spendthrift ; but grudge nothing unto the Lord. The Lord has given, and the Lord taketh away. Blessed is the name of the Lord. Remember that the poor are with you always. 'He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack.' Neglect nothing that shall tend to the improvement of the land. I give it as a charge into thy hands, which thou shalt commit again unto thy children. It is the birthplace of thy fathers ; and it would be well were it the birthplace of thy children's children. And, John, for thy father's sake, thy mother's, and the Lord's, forget nothing which is acceptable in the sight of Him in whom we live, and move, and have our being. Thou wilt be the head when I am gone. See to it that thou art a more worthy head than ever I have been. Herein is thy rule of life"—laying his hand on the Family Bible which lay in front of him—" 'Search

the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life ; and they are they which testify of Me ;' for ' from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus ;' be ye therefore mighty in the Scriptures, that ye may be fervent in the Spirit, and instructed in the ways of the Lord."

Again the old man paused, and again John never spoke a word. His tongue was tied and his mouth was dumb. He knew that in this matter of the farm he had resolved in his own mind a plan of action which was diametrically the opposite of that which his father now laid down, but at this moment he could not hint that this was so even by so much as a syllable. He knew, though he never took his glance from his father's face, that his mother's eyes were fixed on him, eloquent with a yearning plea that he would not dash this cup from the old man's lips. He knew that Oliver fidgeted in his seat, and felt that by his restlessness his brother warned him that it was his part to speak, but he sat in perfect silence and never moved his lips to frame a syllable.

Then his father turned to Oliver. A quick observer would have perceived that there was a difference both in the tone and manner of his speech.

“Oliver, thou art but a young lad yet,”—it was to be noted what a very different listener Oliver was to what John had been. John had remained quiescent all the while, but Oliver was not a moment still, seeming to receive discomfort rather than comfort from his father’s words,—“a score of years but make a stripling, so for a while thou wilt remain with thy brother at the farm. When Robert Anson’s lease runs out thou wilt have his farm. Thou wilt have the means to buy it if it can be bought and if thou wilt. I think it would be better thou shouldst have it out and out, but in that matter let thy brother advise thee when the time shall come. My lad, thou art the son of mine old age. I have thought of thee as though thou wert a Benjamin, the son of my right hand. Be sober, lad, be steady, and be true; whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might. ‘Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.’ Remember, if the Lord is thy

Shepherd thou shalt not want; ay, Oliver, have Him upon thy side and all will be well with thee. I would not be hard upon thee, for thou art young. ‘Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth,’ and when thou art old He will not depart from thee. Ay, Ollie! Ollie!”—it was many a long day since he had used that pet name, and at the sound of it the young man bowed his head upon his hands—“I go a long journey, and thy mother will follow quickly in my path. It is for thyself to say if thou wilt ever follow where we go, and if we shall ever meet again before the jasper throne and by the crystal sea.”

The old man spoke almost with the voice of prophecy; his own salvation he felt to be assured, and with a prophetic eye he warned his son to be careful of his own. And so Oliver was in John’s case; firmly resolved as ever John could be that his father’s plan of life should not be his, he yet could do nothing but bow his face upon his hands and hide it from his father’s eyes.

The old man’s words to his daughters were of a different kind.

“My lasses, is there need for me to say

you are as dear to me as ever your brothers were ? and when I am no more you will find that you are not forgotten. You have cheered my path as only lasses can, but I am but little acquainted with thy kind ; I am not, nor was I ever, a woman's man. Thy mother, my own lass, will tell you more of what is proper in a woman if she would be righteous before the Lord, than ever I could do ; submit yourselves unto your husbands, and let them rule, not you ; in all things, even with the lads, make this your guide," and his hand was again upon the Book. "It is a very mine of wisdom, from which nothing can be had but precious things, and if you will but follow its guidance through good report and evil, nothing shall fall out in this world or in the next which shall not be to you a blessing."

And then he spoke to them all, and there was an under-current of pathos in his voice which thrilled through the heart of each who heard ; the sun had now sank down behind the elms, and just at that moment one solitary bird burst out into a vesper hymn as though it were announcing that now indeed the day was past.

"My children, mine has been the heat and

the burden of the day, and I rejoice to think that it is nearly past. I have long had it on my mind to have this speech with you. Ay, lads and lasses, mine is a father's love. May God so will it that at the proper season you too may know that children are an heritage of the Lord. You are dear unto your mother and to me. Where we go you too must follow. As we are now a united family, let us be then; let none be missing. If we part, 'tis but for a season; we cannot come to you, but you can come to us; and may the Lord so incline your hearts unto wisdom that not one of you, the children of our loins, shall be absent from among the saints of God."

After that he read the twelfth chapter of Ecclesiastes, and those wondrous words had a new meaning and a new beauty as he read them then:—

“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; while the sun, or the light or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain: in the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow them-

selves, and the grinders cease because they are few : . . . because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets : or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was : and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."

And he laid special stress upon the two last verses : "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter : Fear God, and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil."

And then he prayed : and having sung an evening hymn,

"Glory to Thee, my God, this night,
For all the blessings of the light ;
Keep me, oh keep me, King of kings,
Beneath Thine own almighty wings,"

the lads and lasses went to their own rooms, and the old folks stayed below.

CHAPTER V.

SONS IN CONFERENCE.

JOHN and Oliver's bedrooms were adjoining. John, by right of seniority, had the larger, and therein, at the sunset hour, flooded the sun's last glories; it faced the western sky, while Oliver's, which was at its back, knew its happiest hours when dawn broke on the world, and the loving-kindness of the Lord was once more evidenced by the coming of another day. Each room was characteristic of its owner. John's was a spacious apartment; massive oaken beams, unpainted, and long black with age, ran overhead from wall to wall. It was a second curiosity-shop, for a sleeping apartment was by no means the primary use John made of it; it was his study, his laboratory, his workshop, and his all. Part of an old barn he had appropriated to his private use, and there his more cumbrous operations were carried on; but, as a rule, his bedroom formed his headquarters

when his farming work was done. Household accommodation was limited, so he had to make the most of his share of it. The bed had originally been a sort of juvenile "Great Bed of Ware," a mighty four-poster, in the style of our great-great-grandfather's times, but to his mother's secret grief, who revered old furniture, and all old things, he manœuvred until it was removed, and in its place was a camp-bedstead, which occupied the smallest amount of space a bed could occupy. There were books everywhere; with his own deft hands he had lined the walls with shelves, and since he spent the major portion of his earnings upon his precious volumes, he had now a library of which no one need have been ashamed to boast. Models of machines were everywhere, chemical appliances of every kind, wheels and curious instruments, doubtful-looking bottles were arrayed upon a stand, tier above tier, in the manner of a chemist's shop, pipes—for John's almost solitary weakness was an inherent love of tobacco—tobacco jars, mathematical instrument cases, globes, terrestrial and celestial, were scattered about in confusion, the reverse of elegant. So fearful was he that the confusion might be made

worse confounded, that he undertook to be his own handmaid; he made the bed, performed the menial offices, and kept his room in order. His mother made slight objection, for though she both loved and honoured him, she regarded with something akin to horror his room, and the dangerous combustibles which, in her imagination, it contained.

Oliver's apartment, on the contrary, although much smaller, was feminine in its neatness. No one could do too much for him. The spotless curtains, the snowy blinds, the inviting bed furniture, luxuriously white, were so many evidences of female love and tenderness. A few books were on a shelf above his bed, and a little writing-table stood before the window; but though, when the mood was on him, he would cover sheet after sheet with scribble, it was only in the end to consign them to destruction. Deathless poems were floating through his brain, but they evaporated when he endeavoured to transpose them on to paper; works which the world should not willingly let die were, he flattered himself, the conceptions of his genius, but nothing satisfactory was the production of his hand. He did not doubt that the time would come when that

undying thought, that immortal fancy, should take shape and be so smelted in the furnace of his brain that it should come out fine gold, innocent entirely of alloy ; but that time had not come yet. "A certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel through the joints of the harness." How many of us are doing that each day ! How many of us are drawing our bows at a venture, trusting to God to speed the shaft ! How many of us are doing as that certain man did, seeming to know or care nothing how or where we shoot, as though the responsibility were not ours, but God's !

The two rooms which adjoined were connected with each other by a door, so that each, when he pleased, had access to the other's. This morning, when they went upstairs, each retired to his own apartment, but in a minute or two Oliver came out of his into John's. By now the sun had gone ; it was the full, first glory of a summer night ; it was almost as light as day ; the sky was lit by countless myriads of stars ; the moon, near her prime, hung in the cloudless heavens, radiant with radiance seldom seen in these northern climes.

On Oliver's entrance, John, who had not

commenced to undress, was leaning against a bookcase, his hands in his pockets, his brow clouded with thought, his pipe between his lips. He always maintained, with an odd perversity, that his pipe helped him to arrange his thoughts. The window was wide open. Without a word his brother crossed the room, and took his seat upon the window-sill, with his body half in and half out of the summer air. Not a word was spoken, not a movement was made by either. Oliver's face was turned towards the fields; his hands lay lightly on his knees, and his eyes looked out upon the land; but the faintest breeze disturbed the summer air; but the slightest rustling of the leaves was all the noise they heard; the cows were in the field in front of him, and the moon threw their shadows into deeper shade; a field of oats was near to them, and, as the waving grain swung softly in the whispering gale, came to his mind the preacher's sermon of the sight, "Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to the harvest:" verily, in the moonbeams they were white indeed. Bounding the confines of his father's farm he could just see the gleaming waters of the brook stealing through the grassy meads;

Farmer Anson's sheep—that Farmer Anson whose successor his father had planned that he should be—dotted the croft beyond; everywhere was rest and peace, none of the bustle of the day; the moon kept watch and ward over the sleeping world; and none could look upon the scene without yielding in some measure to the sacred influence of that happy hour.

And so the brothers stayed, while the minutes fled, as if unwilling to disturb, by the expression of their troubled thoughts, the peace which hung upon the land. The silence was broken by some one tapping gently at the bedroom door.

“Come in!” said John. The door was opened, and their mother entered, very gently, as though she feared to disturb them by her entrance.

“Mother,” said John, as he advanced to greet her, “is it you?”

“Ay, John, 'tis I.” Her looks, which seemed to forebode trouble, passed from him to Oliver. “Art thou not going to bed? is yon Oliver? My lads”—she still stood almost upon the threshold of the door, she had no light, and the moonbeams shone on her hallowed head

and reverent form—"my lads, if ye only knew what this night has been to me, if ye only knew how dear your father holds ye in his heart! I could not go to bed this night without telling ye how I thank the Lord that it is gone. The Lord will hold ye none the worse if ye do that which is righteous in your father's sight. John, my own boy, my brave, strong lad,"—and the mother laid her trembling hand upon his stalwart shoulders, — "kiss me, for thou art thy mother's pride, thou know'st that I love thee, and thou wouldst not pain thy father, for thou know'st thou art dear to him."

"Mother," said John, as he folded her in his arms, and stooping, kissed her on the lips, "God knows that as my father loves me, so I love him."

With that she was obliged to be content, though she knew and he knew that it was not the answer she would have been glad to hear. Then she crossed to Oliver and kissed him too, and Oliver held her long and fast, for she was very dear to him.

"Lads," said she as she was going, and they knew that she meant ever more than her words conveyed, "you mind what the Psalmist says?"

‘I have been young, and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.’ Is not your father a righteous man? yea, ye will have little hurt if ye follow where he leads.”

“Jock,” said Oliver when she had gone, still looking out upon the moonlit fields, “Jock, what shall we do?”

John did not reply at once, but paced slowly to and fro, picking his way among the miscellaneous collection on the floor. When he did speak, it was rather as though he were communing with himself than in direct reply to his brother’s questions.

“‘Come unto, Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden’—he was quoting those words of Christ, than which none more comfortable ever came from His lips—‘and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls; for My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.’ How easy to say the words; how easy to say, ‘Thy will be done,’ but how difficult to say at times with certainty what Thy will would be,” and the speaker sighed. “What shall we do? I thought I knew before, but now I am not sure.”

Again there was a pause. When Oliver spoke again it was in low dogged tones, through which a thrill of passion and pathos too was running; John still paced to and fro, wrapped in his thoughts.

“I shan’t be a farmer. I can’t—I cannot do it; it is not fair that father should wish me to; he has never asked me once in what way my tastes might lie; he has never once taken the trouble to inquire if I have any hopes of my own in life. Is it fair to arrange my future as though I had no voice in it? Is it my future or his own that he is planning? I will not be a farmer. I would sooner die than be what I loathe with all my heart and soul.”

John stood still, and again leaning against a bookcase, looked across at the vehement speaker. There was even the shadow of a smile upon his face; he knew the lad so well that it was with a curious sense of the ridiculous that he noted his tones of resolution, as though he himself knew anything of the future of which he spoke with so much emphasis.

“Have you considered the matter carefully?” he asked, “have you considered, if you will not be what father wishes, what you would be instead?”

Though nothing was farther from John's mind than any intention of taunting him, Oliver seemed to see in his inquiry something which roused his anger, for with quick passion he replied,—

“You may laugh at me if you please, you have done so before to-day, as though I were a child, not capable of knowing my own mind. You will find that you are wrong. If it had not been for you, father would have known that my mind was made up long ago, that I was resolved to have a voice in the settlement of my own future, that I would not be in the hands of any one as a puppet at a puppet-show.”

There was another interval of silence; John never moved, but his tones were softer, and even the shadow of a smile had gone, as he replied,—

“Do you blame me, Ollie? in what have I done wrong? Was there only yourself to be considered? or was there not father too? Have I ever said that you had no right to a voice in your own future? Since you will have to answer for it to God, it appears to me that it is your voice which should be the chief in it; but One should have a greater voice than

you,—God; and there being diversities of gifts, it is right that each should cultivate his own gift so that it may redound to the glory of God; but in order that we may be able to do this it would be well that we should be quite sure what our own gift is; it is not enough that we should think ourselves assured of what it is not; it would, at least, be prudent to do our duty in one way until it is plain that we could do it better in another, and we are certain what that other is. We know what Jacob said to Reuben before he died, ‘Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel.’ Let us be careful that that reproach does not apply to us. If we choose, let us choose with knowledge, and not for the sake of trying how a change would suit us.”

“It is all very well for you to talk like that,” said Oliver; “everything is cut and dried with you! But do you mean to say that we can force our genius? do you mean to say that we are not to listen to the inward monitor which tells us that one day we shall do great deeds? that the tide will come which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune? Was Paul always an apostle? how many times in history has not the Lord, after years, a lifetime, perhaps, of

waiting, singled out the man who was to do His deeds?"

This speech was so characteristic of the speaker, that, in spite of the burden which was weighing on him, John almost laughed outright; but he constrained himself, and, still retaining his position as before, answered his brother's flood of questioning.

"On one point, Ollie, it is necessary that we should be agreed, and on that I think we are. We both agree that the beginning and the end of life is living to the Lord; this being so, we only need discover how this can best be done. Living to the Lord is an ideal view of life, but it is real as well. If it is an ideal only, we might as well leave it alone; for what is purely ideal is synonymous with what is purely unreal—like a fire which gives out no heat, but only smokes. But it appears to me that it is far from being only an ideal, for we can reduce it to the clearest practice. 'Genius' is a term which is oftener used than understood. I should define it, going a step farther than the dictionaries, as a particular natural talent or aptitude of mind for a particular study of God, and a peculiar power of living unto Him. To speak of 'forcing'

genius is a misnomer, for properly understood it is genius which forces, that is to say, rules in us ; for my part, 'genius' is equivalent to the 'Spirit of the Lord.' And to my mind, a man has no more right to lay claim to the gift of genius, which is the gift of God, if he does not live to God, than he has to claim equality with God Himself. And when you talk of the inward monitor, which tells you that one day you will do great deeds, and that the tide will come which will lead you on to fortune, are you quite sure that you know what you are talking of? Some combinations of words have more sound than sense. Do you mean that you have some inward monitor which tells you that you are to lie idly by until you have an opportunity of doing some unknown deed upon some unknown day? if so, then it must be a very curious monitor indeed, and your idea of what a monitor should be and mine is very different. In my dictionary a monitor informs of duty, gives advice and instruction. Is that the case in yours? And about that mysterious tide? I quite allow that if you are bound for a port, if you survive the buffetings of the waves, a wind and a tide will come which will waft you into harbour at the end. But your

inward monitor does not seem to tell you what harbour you are bound to. Are we to suppose that you would be at home in any? Then why do you object to farming? As to Paul, and the men who have been singled out to do His deeds, if you examine their lives, you will find that they have, above all things, been men of action. To what dreamer can you point as being a man of God? There is nothing so ruinous to every better instinct of man's nature as inaction."

"Well, what is the issue of all that?" asked Oliver, with something of defiance in his tone. "You are always telling me that in everything you say or do you should have a definite end in view."

"The issue," said John,—and he crossed over to where his brother sat,—“the issue!”—and he laid his hand upon his brother's shoulder—“the issue is that I want us to understand each other, so that in what we do we may be sure that we do not act in haste or ignorance, but are doing it to the Lord.”

“Why don't you come to the point!” exclaimed Oliver, with an angry light flashing from his eyes. “It seems to me that you are beating about the bush, and arguing with an

opponent who does not offer opposition. Will you tell me once for all, and with that truthfulness in which you pride yourself, do you think that father has a right to treat us as he has done this evening?"

"Who are we that we should judge our father? Instead of coming to the point, you are going from it. It is not a question of whether father has a right. It appears to me quite simple that so long as we take the right path it does not matter who sets us first upon it, only let us be certain that the path is right. Do you consider, Ollie, what we are to father, and what he has been to us?"

"Jock," cried Oliver, with a sudden burst of passion, the intensity of which took his brother by surprise, "it is because I consider it that it seems so hard; it is because I love him that it seems so hard that he should treat us as though he had no love at all. Why did he not ask us if we had no ambition in life entirely our own? Why did he treat us as though we were of no account? as though we were machines, without a single hope or purpose of our own? We might not be his children, for he seems to take no pleasure in our

pleasures, as though our hopes were none of his."

"Ollie, do you not see that you would do the very thing you are accusing father of? Consider yourself, and not him at all. There is one commandment which I think we children are too liable to overlook: 'Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.' It is clear to me that we have a right to choose our paths in life within certain limits; it is not at present so clear to me whether those paths which father has chosen are not the best for us. Of one thing we may rest assured—you know it, Ollie, as well as I—that he has chosen them in love, and because he thought them for the best."

Before Oliver replied, he rose from his seat upon the sill, and flung his brother's hand from off his shoulder.

"It may be love, but it is a curious way of showing it; he has managed so that if we offer an objection we shall seem disobedient! If he had consulted us before, we should at least have done—what you are so anxious we should do—understand each other. Of one thing I am determined; you cannot accuse me

of instability in that, for I have been of the same mind ever since I can remember ; nothing shall induce me to be a farmer."

And with that he strode across the room, and before his brother could reply, passed through the door into his own.

So John was left alone. The first thing he did was to take a Bible, which lay upon his little writing-table, and hold it in his hand ; he did not open it, but simply held it in his hand, as if it were comfortable to know that it was there. It was plain that whatever he might himself decide, his brother would not fall into their father's plans ; he knew Oliver so well, that he was aware that when one of his fits of obstinacy was upon him, neither rhyme nor reason would move him from his point ; though he would not acknowledge it to himself, the position Oliver had taken up made his own task easier, for he had long resolved that where his brother went he would go too.

He set himself to logically argue out the matter, and this was how he reasoned. First of all, as to his taste for farming ; it was one of the last careers he would himself have chosen ; it would not be right to say, with

Oliver, that he disliked it; his was one of those natures to which no kind of labour is actually ungrateful; he would rather do anything than nothing, but there were so many pursuits which were more congenial to his tastes that it amounted practically to the same. But his father wished it, he might say that his mother wished it too, for, in case of his father's death, he would wish her to make his home hers, and he knew that no home would be really home to her other than the Daintree Farm.

Now, his love for his parents was real and true; if a favourable opportunity had offered, he would willingly have laid down his life for theirs. But the pitfall he was instinctively anxious to avoid was that of sentiment; he wanted to be sure that he was able to advance a real and right reason for whatever he might do. As he himself had said, his ideal of life was living unto God; he wanted to be convinced that he was making as much of life as possible. The more he thought of it the more he became persuaded that his father could not offer a single real and tangible reason why he should adopt the career of a farmer in preference to another; it was with him a question

of sentiment, and of sentiment alone. What was the whole burden of his argument? "Because my fathers have held the farm, therefore you should hold it, and your children's children." John was very certain that it would be improper on his part to compel, or even to attempt to persuade, his children to adopt farming as their pursuit in life simply on such a ground as that; the notion was preposterous: how could he possibly tell what sort of children his would be? They might have abilities for anything but a farmer's life; what should he do then? This presumptive case of his children was actually the case with him. Here was his father endeavouring to compel him to till the ground because, and only because, his ancestors tilled it in their time; what of that? In no sense was their case his. If tradition told the truth, it was, of all pursuits, the one most suited to their tastes, while exactly the contrary was the case with him. Not only so. No one could properly call young John Freeman vain of his own gifts, but it did occur to him that they were unlettered, ignorant men, while he had devoted every available hour of his life to learning, for the sole and express purpose that

he might be able, in the highest sense, to devote that learning to the service of God.

Thus, so far from the balance of reason being on his father's side, in John's judgment it was palpably the other way. He had an exceptional power of being able to overrule his own desires that the truth might come uppermost. Love for his parents was a great factor in his nature, but it appeared to him that this was a case when that love might do good instead of harm; he was inwardly convinced that the state of life in which he would be able to do most good was not that in which his father would have him stay. Before he went to bed that night he brought the matter, as was his wont, to God. He decided that he would intercede with his father, that he would lay his own views before him and endeavour to win him over to his side; and he prayed the Lord that He would guide his father, his brother, and himself, that they might be led into the way of truth, and that they might do those things which were most to the credit of His holy name.

CHAPTER VI.

*JOHN FREEMAN THE YOUNGER LAYS HIS
VIEWS BEFORE HIS FATHER.*

A WEEK passed and nothing was said. This was chiefly owing to the fact that they were just then in the first flush of harvesting. Every hour of the day every one in the house was busy; the old man had not a spare moment upon his hands, for, despite his age, and although he knew that he might have trusted John implicitly, he was here, there, and everywhere, seeing with his own eyes that the work was done; habit had become his second nature, and so long as he was able, it was plain that he could not find it in his heart to really relegate the chief authority to any one. Then, too, some of the reapers were as old as he himself. In his youth he had employed them, and in their age, although the time when they could do a hard day's work was long since past, he employed them

still. It was pleasant to see his bent form passing through the harvest-fields. Whenever he reached a sexagenarian reaper he would stop, and shake hands with him, and inquire how things were at home, and not unlikely they would fall into desultory chat, and remind each other of the harvests five-and-thirty years ago, and perhaps farther back than that; for 'there were giants in those days.'

The old gentlemen would get together, sickle in one hand, cotton handkerchief in the other, and while the young ones were doing their full day's work for their full day's pay, would rake up their recollections of long ago, and recount the wonders they had seen. Nor was old John Freeman the most backward among them; they had done their full day's work in their time, and now they might well be pardoned a little idleness; and if their talk was hardly intellectual, it was innocent, and they were simple souls.

"Ay," one would say, mopping his head with his gorgeous handkerchief, "Muster Freeman, but d'ye mind yon yeer when thy feether coomed least to hearvest hoom? ay, but ee (I) was but a leed, but ee meend it weel; ay,

the Loord took heem as 'tweer's but a wee, preesed be Hees hooly neeme!"

"'Tweer's a reeghteous meen thy feether, Muster Freeman," No. Two would say. "Ay, 'tweer's heem as wealked bleemeless before the Loord."

"Seed hee (he) to ee (I)," would No. Three continue when Nos. One and Two were short of breath, "ay, I meend et weel—'tweer's a dee like yon, nee clood upon the skee. 'Ay, Tummas,' seed heer to ee, 'tweer feen by heer, but 'tweer feener,' seed hee to ee, 'eyont the skee.'"

But though old John Freeman might be led into a gossip now and then, he was tired out when the day was done, and young John could not find it in his heart to add to his burdens yet. Moreover, in his judgment, not only was it not a case in which there was need for haste, but it was better that there should be none; a day or two, or even a week or two, would be of no account; it was better to wait until the harvesting was done.

But Oliver thought otherwise, and it was his impatient impetuosity which forced him to speak before he had intended. To Oliver the season of harvest was peculiarly objection-

able ; it was a season when, if idleness was not actually impossible, for very shame he could not stand idle and useless by when all were working. One evening, the day's work being done, he and John were walking through the half-reaped fields, and he chose that as a favourable opportunity for once more detailing his grievance for his brother's edification. It was a glorious evening ; even the old men who as a rule were able to draw up, from the bottomless well of their memory, recollections of seasons such as shall never be known again, were fain to acknowledge that they never had known finer days for harvest than the Lord was giving now. John and Oliver stood on a slope looking towards the setting sun, and as they noted the exceeding glory of the western sky the opening words of the twenty-fourth Psalm came to the mind of the elder brother, and almost unconsciously he uttered them aloud—

“ ‘The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof ; the world, and they that dwell therein. For He hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods. Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord ? or who shall stand in His holy place ? He that hath

clean hands, and a pure heart, who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully !' To think that any one could look upon a scene like this, and yet pretend to believe there is no God, and to think that any one could look upon such evidences of His loving-kindness, His power, His might, and yet deny His Presence ! I don't know how it is, but I always feel awed when I look upon a sunset, as though He were nearer to me then than at any other time. What are all the works of men compared unto the works of the Lord !”

The words were uttered in reverie rather than addressed to Oliver, and certainly there was nothing in them at which he could take offence ; but he was in a captious mood, discontented with himself, therefore discontented with all besides—dreamily discontented, he knew not at what or why ; it was in plaintive, querulous tones he commented upon his brother's speech.

“All the works of men ?” They had reached a hedge, he was seated on a stile, and John stood at his right hand. “Yes, indeed ! if they are no better than mine are promising to be, they must be hardly worth the counting !”

He stopped, but seeing that John made no reply he went on, still in the same complaining fashion.

“You say you are going to speak to father; why don't you speak to him now? what is the use of putting it off from day to day? That is the policy you have pressed upon me all my life, postponement and delay; and yet you always say that life's so very real! At present, my life is nothing but a sham; I hate the work—I hate it all! it is so miserably small! there is nothing to look forward to! it cramps my energies, I feel as though I were in a prison, I want to break loose from it all; every hour it becomes harder to bear!”

“That is just the secret—you want to break loose from it all. You are like a child, who longs, he knows not why, to be a man; it is well for him, when he is a man, if he does not long to be a child again.”

“That is how you always talk to me, as though I were a child.” So spoke Oliver, the man of twenty. “In what am I so particularly childish I should like to know?”

That is a favourite way with us; quick to suspect some one of finding fault, we turn upon the speaker as though we are of all things

desirous that he should show us in what our faults might be. We go out of our way indeed to invite his criticism, but woe betide him if he accept our invitation ; we turn upon him in a passion, as though he were guilty of a crime than which none could be more heinous ; we bring the judgment upon ourselves, and then we actually attack the judge whom we have brought for coming ! Poor human nature ! how we deceive ourselves ! Only with difficulty can we bring ourselves to own that we are imperfect, as though it were possible to be perfect until we have removed our imperfections, forgetting—how often we forget !—that “if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”

For this reason John was careful not to answer Oliver's question which he so pointedly put. Had he desired to enter into controversy, he might have answered it with another, “In what are you not childish ?” For, practically, in everything his was the nature of a child ; seven-tenths of his speeches were the utterances of a child ; his impatience of control was unworthy of a man ; the dreamy, unsettled condition of his mind resembled in no slight degree that curious stage of the infantile im-

agination when it is possessed by a half-doubtful belief in the nonsensical lore of fairydom. But of all things, the one which John was most desirous to avoid was such a controversy as that, so he ignored the question utterly. With half a smile he turned towards his brother and said—

“ You must forgive me, Ollie, but it really seems to me that your objection to farming applies to a pursuit of any kind ; what is it you would like to be ? ”

But Oliver was posed ; nor was his case an exceptional one. There are many Oliver Freemans in the world, possessed with a restless, unreasonable distaste for that station in life in which they are at present placed, yet who would be quite unable to give you a clear definition of what other they would prefer instead ; as though life were to be trifled with like that ; as though existence were a plaything ; as though the fleeting humour of every passing moment were to make a human soul its sport and pastime ! Oliver, being unable to satisfactorily answer such a query, resorted to the usual method in such a case ; he threw himself into a rage.

“ I'm not going to trifle any longer ”—as

though anybody but himself had been trifling all along—"if you don't speak to father, I will! I've yielded to you too much already; no wonder you think me nothing but a child"—the morally weak have always a tendency to harp upon their own sore points—"I'll go straight to father, and tell him all."

And he sprang off the stile, with the intention of carrying his threat into instant execution; but this John would by no means allow. He knew what sort of telling his would be, so he laid his hand upon his brother's shoulder, and held him fast.

"Let me go!" cried Oliver, "let me go, do you hear? I will be dictated to no longer, for I'll tell him all!"

"Ollie," said John very gravely, still detaining his angry brother, "this will not do; we agreed that this should be my business. If I had my way I would wait till father had the harvest off his mind, and were not so worn and weary; but since you insist on having yours, I promise you that I will speak to him to-night before the sun goes down."

With that Oliver had to be content. With little grace he accepted his brother's promise,

and returned to his rest upon the stile; John turned to go, and leave him there.

“Mind,” said Oliver, as he saw the action, “mind, let there be no mistake about it; I will not stay, nothing will induce me to. If you hold out any possibility of such a thing, you do it on your own responsibility, not mine.”

John had already gone some steps, but as Oliver ceased he stopped, and turning again, addressed to him a few last words. His face was very calm and cold, but Oliver’s was hot and flushed. Just then a cloudlet flashed between the sun and them, and cast them into temporary shadow.

“I am sorry that you cannot trust me.” Oliver’s manner had stung him into something like a retort at last, but he spoke rather in pain than anger. “You would be the sole arbiter of your own life; I do not blame you; but have you considered if your strength be equal to your burden? You will find it easier to throw down than to build up again.”

Before Oliver could answer, he turned, and walked quickly down the slope in the direction of the farm. Only once he paused by the way, and that was by the stile which



“His mother stood on one side, looking across the fields, while her daughter stood upon her left, twined arm in a'm.”—Page 131.

led into the yard. He hesitated a moment, and moved into the shadow of the hedge; he took his hat off, and bowed his head in silent prayer for his father, his mother, and his brother, and himself in the last place of all. It was an axiom with John Freeman the younger, from the practice of which he never swerved, on all occasions whatsoever, when troubles overtook him, to bring them to the Lord.

When he crossed the stile the first persons whom he saw, standing in the porch, were his mother and his sisters. The porch was an old-fashioned structure, paved with stone, a wooden settle on either side, shrined, at this season of the year, in a canopy of bankshia roses; his mother stood on one side, looking across the fields, while her daughter stood upon her left, twined arm-in-arm.

“Where’s thy brother?” his mother asked, as he came up the path; “did not he go with thee across the fields?”

“Yes, mother,” answered John, as he raised his hat and, stooping, kissed her upon the brow, for never was a son more observant of outward courtesies than John, “and he is there yet, dreaming, perhaps, golden dreams. He

is or was, when last I saw him, sitting on the stile in the upper field, looking towards the setting sun. Where is father?"

Whether there was something in the tone in which he asked the question, which struck warningly upon her ear, or whether her affection caused her to be constantly on the alert, a frightened look came upon her patient face, and she glanced sharply towards him.

"Thy father? He is in the room; dost thou want to speak to him, my lad? I will come with thee then."

"Nay, mother," and laying his hands upon her shoulders he prevented her from moving, "that cannot be. What I have to say to father I must say to him alone; it is better so."

"John!" his mother cried; but already he was gone, and, seeing it was so, she put her hands up to her face, and sank upon a settle in the porch.

Old John Freeman was seated in solitary state, his long churchwarden between his lips, when his son came in; his coat was off, for the evening was warm, and his waistcoat was unbuttoned. He was in that calm, contented mood which was characteristic of him.

at the evening hour, happy in the Lord. There are few feelings so comfortable—it is the secret of the elixir of happiness in life—as the consciousness that we have done our duty; let us only be sure of that and we need fear no evil. “Thy rod and Thy staff,” verily, “they comfort me.” It is at such seasons that we are able, in entire sympathy with the Psalmist, to say, “Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him.”

When the door opened and John entered, his face lit up with a glad smile, and he held out his hand to him.

“Well, lad, and art thou come? I was thinking of thee at that very moment—of thee, and of thy brother too. What a harvest ’tis we’re having! How great is the Lord’s goodness unto us! John, when thy time comes, be careful that ye always thank the Lord for all the mercies which He sends.”

John made no reply; it was touching too nearly upon the business on which he came. He moved round the table, and sat down opposite his father, so that his back was to the window. There was silence for some few seconds, he looking at his father, and his father looking back at him.

“ Well, lad,” said his father, still speaking cheerily, wholly unsuspecting of what was in the air, “ what is it thou hast to say ? I see thou hast something on thy mind. Is there aught wrong in harvesting ? Or is it something of thy own concerns ? ”

Again John paused before replying. Then, leaning across the table, in those low, clear tones which were peculiar to him—

“ Father,” he said, “ we have been good sons to you, both Oliver and I ? ”

His father stared ; he did not see the drift of the question, and was surprised at it.

“ And that thou hast, the best of sons ; I thank the Lord in that He has given me my children as an heritage from Him.” It was said with such unconscious simplicity and heartiness that it almost stopped John’s lips, as though the words contained a reflection on what was yet to follow.

“ Father,” continued John, strangely at a loss, feeling wholly unable to approach the subject with his usual straightforward frankness, “ you remember how David was appointed to keep the sheep, how Simon and Andrew were fishers ; such, doubtless, they were appointed by their fathers, and in

each case the appointment was a worthy one, for both the keeper of the sheep and the fisherman are worthy before the Lord. But the Lord had given them special gifts, which, while not actually disqualifying them for their places, qualified them more especially for other services." He paused, while his father, wholly at a loss to know what he was aiming at, waited for him to continue in a condition of mind very like bewilderment.

"Father, do not think that I would compare ourselves to them, but I believe that the principles which apply in their case may be applied in others. I believe that I do not speak without consideration when I say that I think"—he paused, and looked his father steadily in the face—"that it is not impossible they may apply in ours."

"May apply in yours!" cried old John, more and more bewildered. "What do you mean, my lad? I do not follow thee one whit! Thou dost not mean to say that thou thinkest thyself a David, or a Simon Peter, or an Andrew?"

"Nay, father, indeed I do not say that; but consider their cases for a moment. All three of them were trained, and doubtless in-

tended by their father, to take one walk in life, while the Lord willed that they should take another." Again he stopped, so that the old man might have an opportunity of following his meaning in its entirety. "Do you not think that that might be the case, in a lesser degree, with other sons and other fathers—with you and us?"

His father rose instantly, and, laying his pipe upon the table, looked down at John.

"Do I not think what? Lad, why dost thou not speak plainly what thou hast in thy heart to speak, so that I may understand thee well?"

The old man's voice was no more cheery, but hard and stern, though there was a quiver in it too. John's voice was still low and quiet, though his heart was beating fast, as he explained his point for his father's comprehension.

"This is what I mean; and if you will bear with me a while I will try to make it clear to you where the analogy exists. You have decided that we shall be farmers; you have done it out of love for us, we know it, and because you believe it for the best; but, father, you must forgive me what I say," for he noted the

strange look upon the old man's face. "You have decided without consulting us in any way; you have never endeavoured to learn what were our own views upon the matter. If you had done so you would have saved me this explanation now, for the hearts of neither of us incline to farming."

The old man never spoke a word; he was silent for some moments, and then he sank back in his chair. John, startled at his looks, rose and moved towards him; but he warned him from him with a gesture.

"Do not touch me now; sit thee down and let me hear thee out; this is a new lesson thou art teaching me. I have long known thy learning was before my own, but I knew not that it went so far as this would seem; all my study is of His Word, and thou art showing me old truths anew. So your hearts incline not to your father's ways; this I wist not before. Whither would ye go?"

There was a new ring of bitterness, of sarcastic irony in his voice and manner, John had not heard before. He answered in the same calm tone, though, if his father had chosen to look, he would have seen the trouble in his face.

“On that matter we would consult with you.”

“That is good of ye, that is very good. But let us have no shilly-shallying now. I have been blind as yet. Let my eyes be wide-opened now. Thou hast likened thyself to Peter. It may be that I am like to Paul, for the scales are falling from my eyes, that I may see the truth. When ye say your hearts do not incline to farming, what is it that ye mean? Tell it in plain words.”

“All our lives long we have longed for other things; indeed we have trained ourselves for other things. We would not bind ourselves to farming.”

“So”—and in the bitterness of his father’s tone the son knew that the bitterness of his heart was speaking—“this is to be the end of all that I had hoped. These are the children of mine heritage. Seven-and-twenty years ago, when first I saw thy face, I thanked the Lord for giving me a son who should fill my place when I was gone. I thanked the Lord in haste. Year after year, as I saw thy strength increasing, I thanked the Lord in all my waking hours; for I saw in thee a successor more worthy than myself. I have

buildd mine house upon the sand, and the winds and the waves have swept it down."

Although he ceased, John found never a word to say. He stood motionless as a statue. He had anticipated his father's feelings, and knew him so well that he felt that to attempt to comfort him in this first hour would be worse than vain. His desire was great, but his power small. The old man sat, one hand upon the table, staring into vacancy, a stony look upon his face, and his son thought that he had never seen him look so old before.

"When my father was alive he bade me bring up my sons that they might take up the trust which he had committed to my charge. I had already thanked the Lord that I had fulfilled his bidding; and this is to be the end of all. Well indeed is it written, 'Take no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.' I am like that man who built great barns, and stored his riches, and bade his soul eat, drink, and be merry; but he reckoned without His God."

And the old man bowed his head upon his hands. Seeing which John approached to com-

fort him ; but his father waved him from him with a restless movement. So, after momentary hesitation, John left the room to seek his mother and send her to him, that she might fulfil the divine office of a woman—to comfort in affliction.

CHAPTER VII.

A FATHER'S TROUBLE.

IN one day it almost seemed as if ten years had been added to John Freeman's age. He had not seemed so old as his years before, now he seemed their senior. All at once the iron had entered into his soul; the blow had been struck by the hand from which he least expected it. How often that is in life! how often he or she who has been nearest and dearest to our hearts is the one who breaks them at the last! "O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out." One thing we know, and what need we know but that? that all He does is right, "For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him."

Yet such a sight as that which John Freeman presented now is not without its pathos.

Almost the hardest knowledge which can be ours is the knowledge that the hopes, the mortal hopes—for immortal hopes can never undergo any change but in fulfilment—of a life are blighted. It is not necessary that those hopes should be reasonable ones; we do not stop to consider whether we have a right to count upon their realisation; right or wrong, logical or illogical, when the hopes of a life are blighted, life seems blighted too.

And these dreams which John Freeman dreamed were neither unnatural nor uncommon. Most fathers, to whom their sons are dear, nourish in their hearts the trust that, when their time comes, their sons will occupy the place which they now fill. The father rejoices in his prosperity, not for his own sake only, but for the sake of those who shall come after him; he thanks the Lord in that he has been permitted to obey the apostolic injunction, "For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children." That is a trying hour in his life when he learns that his efforts have been in great part thrown away, for his children will not follow the road which he has marked out for them, but are bent on marking out one of their own.

To old John Freeman it was doubly and trebly bitter. He had been, as he himself said, like the rich man who stored up his riches in his barns, and bade his soul eat, drink, and be merry, certain that what he desired would come to pass. He had been blind, and blindness is a pitiable state, in any case whatever. Wo unto him who is blind and cannot see things as they are! It was the fault rather of his education than his nature, for as a rule he was shrewd enough, and clear-sighted as any man. What he had longed for he had longed for so intensely that because of the strength of his longing he had taken for granted that it would be. It had never entered into his imagination that a son of his could desire to be anything but a farmer. That, again, is no uncommon state of mind. A father is inclined to think that of course his son's tastes will be his own, and it cuts him to the heart if he finds that they are antagonistic. In the old man's eyes no earthly pursuit was to be compared to farming; his reverence of it was almost sacred, indeed it came next to his Bible. It was a pursuit handed down from father to son through the ages in perpetuity; to his knowledge no Freeman had ever followed

another craft, and he knew none which one could follow now. He turned to his Bible and rejoiced to see that all the patriarchs, from the days of Adam to the days of Israel, had been tillers of the soil; it was the lot which was ordained by God for man; it was the lot which the Freemans had always taken up with willing hearts; it was, as we have said, almost sacred in his eyes, it was the family tradition; from time immemorial the Freemans had been righteous, God-fearing men, and farmers. Unconsciously the two were together—righteousness and farming—in his mind; was the sequence to be broken now? were they, in these later days, to throw off the traditions of their fathers, and seek new gods.

The first result, when he fully understood what John desired to convey, was to shun him; he was dismayed—the thing was wicked. By degrees, if we continue in one groove all our lives, we begin to think that those who are not in our groove are of those who err; and this quite conscientiously, and in perfect simplicity of heart. More especially is this applicable to our children. If they move out of one particular groove, that in which we

have endeavoured to bring them up, and in which we ourselves were trained, because they do so we are almost inclined to fear they sin, forgetting that there are diversities of gifts, that we are to "covet earnestly the best, and yet," with Paul, "show I unto you a more excellent way." The strong man, who had never really felt his age before, bowed his head upon his hands, and trembled like a leaf. Now he was old; he had been young before. Ordinarily a very clear line of demarcation is that which divides youth from age; the young too often is he who says unto his soul, "Eat, drink, and be merry;" the old, the same man when God has said to him, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee." We have no right to be young only when we have what we desire, and old when what we would have is no more ours. Is that the spirit in which we say, "Thy will be done?" Age had come on him like a thief in the night, in an instant he had been stricken down, and for the first time for many and many a year the old man wept. "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace," was his prayer, though in a very different spirit to Simeon's. How fatal a mark it is

of human nature that we are always most ready to "depart in peace" when we are stricken by the Lord, while we are always willing to put off His coming when the sky is clear, the sun is shining, and we have all the fruits of the earth to thank Him for!

The old man's solitude was disturbed by the door being opened at his back, and his wife entering so gently that she did not rouse him by her coming. Unconscious of her presence, he never moved, but still stayed with his head bowed upon his hands. Stepping very quietly, she approached his side, and laid her hand upon his shoulder.

"My man," said she, and her voice was very gentle, "my man, what is it's ailing thee?" He started at her touch, but never raised his face; he kept his head still bowed, and his frame still shook with the emotion he could not command. As though he were a child, and she his mother, very tenderly her arm stole round his neck, and she stooped down so that his cheek was touching hers.

"My man," and her homely voice had that rare music which a woman's has when she would comfort those she loves, "my man, is it hard to bear? is it thy own trouble? nay,

what is thine is mine; 'tis for thy lass to share."

He raised his head, and turned his eyes so that they looked into hers. Her simple, kindly face was full of sympathy, and there was a dimness in her loving eyes. His rugged features had undergone a surprising change—a change which she was amazed to see; the strong man was all at once weak as a child; his sternness had melted like a summer cloud; in the first moments of bewilderment it seemed to her that he was a wreck of what he was. The determination of his mouth had gone, and his lips twitched with painful weakness; the lines of strength upon his cheeks and brow were lines of weakness now; his eyes were filled with tears; his whole manner was touchingly pathetic, it was so like a child's; but in his voice was the greatest change of all. In weak, trembling accents—

"My lass," he said, "the days of the years of my pilgrimage have been many and long, many and blessed have they been, but the evil days have come, when the sound of the grinding is low, and the silver cord is loosed, and the golden bowl is broken; for all of my life that remains to me is vanity."

She did not ask again what it was that ailed him, she knew without the asking; she had looked forward to this hour with a trembling fear no words could tell, but now that it had come, her nature rose superior to her sorrow, and her strength was equal to her need; she forgot herself in him; she fulfilled that first requirement of true love, for in his sorrow she cared nothing for her own.

“My man,” she said, and she knelt down by his side, still with her arm about his neck, and whispered very gently in his ear, “my man, is it so very hard to bear? Is it meet that in this thine hour thou shouldst forget thy Lord? Is He not to thee a very present help in trouble? ‘Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee: He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.’ Ay, how often hast thou proved it true! Canst thou not cast this thy burden on the Lord?”

The old man did not at once reply; he sat quite still, looking in his wife’s sweet face; and when he did speak, he raised his hand and smoothed the hair from off his brow.

“Lass, lass!” and his voice was still weak and faltering, “all that is left to me—all that is left, my own old wife. ‘If I am bereaved of

my children, I am bereaved.' The Lord—the Lord is very good."

"My man," said she, "thou hast no right in speaking so; thou art not bereaved of thy children; as they have been good children, so are they still; maybe they see not their father's wisdom, but thou know'st they see their father's love."

"Love!" and for the first time he was something like his old self again; his voice was stern, and his face was strong, and he looked upon his wife as her master and her man. "What call'st thou love? is love in a child without obedience? How sharper than a serpent's tooth is an ungrateful child! I tell thee there is no truth without proof, and the proof of love is an obedient child. When I was young, could I have loved my father had I been disobedient to his will? if I had opposed mine to his, and so made an end of all that made life worth to him? Nay, lass; my lads and I go different ways. So long I deemed that mine was theirs, but it seems that I was wrong; let them take their own, and leave me to die in mine! Is that a child-like love?"

His wife tried to interpose a word, for his

anger now was as bad to her as his grief before ; but he prevented her by rising from his seat and pacing to and fro.

“But am I a child that I am dismayed by them? Nay; I will show them, though I am their father, I am not dead yet; they shall draw from me no tears; and though they break my heart I will hold up my head; and though they bring my grey hairs in sorrow to the grave, my face shall wear a smile. This is the reward of children! this is mine heritage from the Lord! But a night ago I dreamed that I was as a green bay-tree, fanned by the fertile breezes, and my seed inherited the land, and lived in honour before the Lord; but in the night an enemy has come, and my dream is dead! Oh, how have I been like unto the fool in the parable, and how has the Lord said unto me, ‘Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee!’”

And the old man stood in the centre of the room, his clenched hands hanging by his sides, his face turned up to heaven, as though he saw, beyond the evening sky, in very truth the Lord, who thus spake unto his soul. There was silence. Then his wife, rising from her knees, moved across the room to him.

“John,” she said, “my man, is't not a radiant sky? Is not the Lord gracious and long-suffering? See how the fields are ripe unto the harvest. See how the evening shadows bring peace unto the weary day. Dost mind thy own best psalm? “Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits . . . Like as a father”—and the woman's voice sank into the softest whisper as she spoke the words which have thrilled through the hearts of all those countless myriads to whom they are so dear—“Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him”—and the woman's head sank upon his bosom, and she wept.

“How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
In a believer's ear!
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,
And drives away his fear.”

How true it is! The simple repetition of the words of Scripture had gone right to his heart, and his better self was back again. If we would only understand, if we would only realise the power, the strength, which is given by the mere utterance, “In a believer's ear,” what a lesson

we should learn ! No voice of poet, no strain of melody, can be equal to the sound of the voice of God. If we always strive, in all times of peril and of need, of sickness and of health, of joy and sorrow, of youth and age, to hear that voice, even as we strive to hear the voice of love, what a hearing ours would be !

Old John Freeman pressed his wife to his bosom, and held her there. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." The words seemed to open up the fountains of his heart, and for a time he was bereft of speech. And when he did speak, his voice was no more stern, but almost as soft and gentle as his wife's had been.

"God bless thee, lass. Thou art very good to me. How many a time hast thou kept my feet from slipping ! I know no want while thou art still mine own."

So they remained, folded in each other's arms. Whom God has joined, let no man put asunder. She was to him a present help in trouble. Happy is the man whose wife is of the Lord !

"My man," said she, when calm was restored again—she was still in her husband's arms, looking up at him with a trustful smile

upon her tender face, and they still stood where the sunset rays lighted up their forms—“my man, what is it you would do?”

“Lass”—they were sweethearts once again, he a lad and she a lass—“lass, I cannot say. We will take it to the Lord, and He will guide.”

“You will not be hard upon the lads?”

“I will not be hard!” But his voice was not so gentle now.

“Ye will bear it in your mind that they are but lads, and lads are aye hardly ruled, but love to rule; and if they are bent in their own ways, ye will be soft to them, and love them still, and forgive them too.”

“My lass,” and he spoke with a trace of his old sternness, “this is a new matter which I have yet hardly learned; it is new to me that the sons shall rule the father, and not the father rule the sons. We will bring the matter to the Lord and He will guide; hitherto I wist not it was read rightly thus.”

Insensibly his form grew straight again; unconsciously he loosed his hold and let his wife pass from his bosom. With the best will in the world he could not treat his sons' behaviour in this off-hand fashion; he was very

English in his stubbornness and his stability; he could not throw off in a moment the traditions of generations, the hopes of a lifetime, even if he would; and he would not, for they had been dear to him as his own life.

“What would you have me do? you would not have me sin? and from my childhood upwards I was taught that, next to God, a son owed obedience to his father. Is it a light thing that, in mine age, I should throw aside the teaching of my youth lest I seem stern? Not so, my lass; we will take it to the Lord and He will guide.”

“But,” said she, persisting, as women will do when they have their point at heart, “but they love thee dearly; I will answer for it that they do.”

“Wife,”—and now, indeed, his voice was strong and decided as it used to be,—“wife, thou must not press me now; thou knowest I will not act in haste. This hour has been the bitterest I have known; in time, it may be, the bitterness will pass, and then I will listen to all thou hast to say; at present,” and his words were tinged with bitterness, “I am in no mood to hearken to thy advocacy of their cause.”

The words conveyed, or it seemed to her that they conveyed, reproach; that was hard to bear; her tender soul was hurt at the slightest sign that he was grieved, and grieved by her. She again put her arms about his neck and pillowed her head upon his breast. It is proper and righteous before the Lord that the woman should naturally cling to her husband in distress.

“My man! my man! thou art not hurt at me; thou knowest I am on thy side; but I do love thee so well that I love thy children too.”

The application of the word “thy” was a very woman’s stroke; it insinuated that she loved them not for her own sake, but for his, because they were from him. He did not reply in words, but stooping, sealed her lips with a long and loving kiss; so they were one again.

But though peace still reigned in the house, it was not the peace of yore. The old man was changed, bodily and mentally, and his bodily change was the evidence of his mental one. Strive how he would, it was not in his power to deny that a blow had been struck, and that the blow had gone well

home. All at once he had become aged indeed, and the fact was the more lamentable because he endeavoured to deny that it was so. He would still do, or, rather, strive to do, what he was wont to do; he would still strive to see that work was done. It was pitiable to see his failure, more pitiable still to see his grief at it. He could not walk without a stick, nor much with that; yet every morning, breakfast being done, he would set out to journey through the fields to see how harvest was progressing, but, unknown to him, they watched him from afar. Once they found him sitting beneath a hedge, his stick lying by his side, crying as though his heart would break; and again, leaning against a tree, trying to totter on, crying all the time.

“Wife,” he said on this occasion, when they brought him home, “I am like that fig-tree to which Jesus said, ‘Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?’” And he cried again; and though his wife strove, in her loving, patient way, to comfort him, like Rachel weeping for her children, he would not be comforted.

But the truth was that in this matter the Lord had nearly discovered him in a very

grievous sin—idolatry ; instead of repining, he should have thanked the Lord for saving him from himself before it was too late. But how often do we not persist in reading life's history our own way and not the Lord's ! This old man, who was so near to God, and had indeed striven faithfully to be His servant, had, unconsciously, almost set up an idol of his own ; that idol was his farm. " O Lord," he had often said in his heart, and meant it too, " gladly would I give up all for Thee ! " And yet, even standing on the threshold of eternity, it cut him to the heart to give up his farm. He was practically rebelling against the Lord's decree by closing his eyes against the evidence of His will. Idolatry is the subtlest of sins ; it is the most heinous, yet the easiest disguised ; with characteristic art the devil selects his worst devilry, and so dresses it up that at first sight we are inclined to mistake it for God Himself. Consider what a peril that is, and yet it is not impossible that each one of you who reads is trifling with it now.

John Freeman had certainly been so doing, and not only had been, but was still ; at the eleventh hour of his life his love for his farm was rivalling his love for God ; it was almost

the parable of the Great Supper over again ; he was not very different from those men who "all with one consent began to make excuse." Make no mistake about it, you cannot serve God and mammon ; and if mammon does at any time, in any shape whatever, intercede between you and God, you are in awful peril of your soul. There is no excuse for any one to plead ignorance ; the word "mammon" signifies "the god of riches ;" if you allow that god to intrude itself between you and your God, or worship it in any shape whatever, then it is plain as Holy Writ that you must be in peril of your soul.

Old John Freeman's star threatened to sink in mist ; it had shone in a cloudless sky so far, and now, for the first time, it threatened to grow dim. And though we confess that his position has its pathetic side, yet in the pathos we must not forget the fact ; when filled with tears—a common state of things with some—our eyes grow dim, and we must be careful that we do not lose our sight through grief. It is easy to keep one's head above water-mark when the tide is low ; it requires a strong swimmer to do it when the tide is high ; so it is easy to be strong, and bold,

and happy, to thank the Lord, when one's path is filled with roses, and there is all the heart desires; it is a different thing when it is the Lord's way, not ours, when, to our eyes, everywhere are clouds, and the way is dark. Yet it is obvious that if we are to say "Thy will be done" at all, we must say it always, and always in the same spirit; it is simple mockery—and let him beware who mocks the Lord—to say "Thy will be done" only when the will is ours, or to say it with perfect content and full meaning only when our pet schemes are being fulfilled. Yet this was what John Freeman seemed to think that he might do; he had said "Thy will be done" with great heartiness all his life long; but now all at once he found that his will clashed with the Lord's, and if he said it at all, it was with faltering lips and in trembling tones.

This was a very perilous, a very pitiable thing; yet, if you consider it well, you will perceive that it is not the element of pity which should strike us as of the first importance.

CHAPTER VIII.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS.

It was a grievous thing to all that household the change which had come upon its head. So long the Lord had blessed them in one way, that they hesitated now that He evidenced His mercy and His wisdom in another. At first, so were they taken by surprise, that they almost failed to see, in this new aspect of affairs, that the Lord was still unchanged, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, all-wise, all-loving, and all-good. That is not seldom the case with us ; when a sudden apparent change sweeps across the even tenor of our lives, we are amazed, rebellious even, apt to forget, in the first flush of our surprise, that though seemingly all has changed, really all is still the same ; for to the man who has builded his house upon the rock, the storms may rage, and the winds may blow, the face of nature may seem changed ; but to him,

secure in his habitation, wise in his trust, firm in the Rock of Ages, all is still the same.

Hitherto the chief characteristic of the Freeman family had been that they were indeed one family, in spirit and in truth; they had been one household in faith, one in love, and one in hope. Now this was changed, or seemed to be; the spirit of dissension had come in. A family is not unlike a house built on piles; while all remain, the house is firm, but let one be taken away, and it either comes toppling down, or shames the building by falling away from the perpendicular; it is no more symmetrical, no more a house in which one would like to live. This spirit of dissension which had come had practically the same results as though a pile had been removed; the family was all awry, out of the perpendicular. The consciousness that this was so was by no means pleasant, the more unpleasant because of the contrast it presented. Undoubtedly a united family is righteous before the Lord; a disunited family, one whose members are at variance with each other, is, in the sense which the Lord intended it to be, no family at all. The idea of a family pre-

supposes unison. We speak of one family, and one body, the words are almost synonymous; and he or she, father or mother, son or daughter, who brings strife into a family, does that which is not righteous before the Lord. Through all these years there had been no sign of strife in the Daintree household; and though, in the vulgar sense, there was no actual strife now, there was dissension, and the knowledge that it was so was a pain to all.

But each looked at it in a different way. Perhaps of the children the one who felt it deepest was the eldest, John; and that because his feelings were logical, and, to the best of his ability, founded on sound sense. He loved his father with that love which desires to reverence, but, study the matter as he would, he could not but feel that in this matter his father was not right, but wrong; moreover, it seemed to him that he was doubly wrong, for he was wronging himself and seeking to wrong his children too. Unconsciously, young John's mind was intensely critical; he criticised himself so thoroughly, strove so hard to live up to his own high standard, that, almost without his knowing it, he looked at others with the same eyes with which he looked upon himself.

There was always one great leading question which he asked himself on all occasions of uncertainty, Was a thing right or wrong, judged by the standard of the Book and of the Lord? We have ill-performed our task if we have led any to suppose that he was what is commonly called a "prig," or that his was in any way the spirit of the Pharisee. On the contrary, his frame of mind was one of unstudied humility; he did not rate himself highly, because he did not rate himself at all; it was his earnest endeavour to follow the Lord in what he deemed the spirit of the Lord; he bore constantly in mind the words of Christ, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me," and it was his chief desire to find that field in which his powers might be of most service, and in which he would so be enabled to live best unto the Lord. After much and mature deliberation, it appeared to him that that field he had found; and since his father would neither listen to reason nor argument, would not even give him an opportunity to explain his views, but simply relied on the sentiment of very fallible family traditions, it seemed to John that, at best, he was considering himself before the

Lord : therefore it pained him the more to think that in his sorrow—which being the father's was the son's—he was not right, but wrong.

Oliver, too, was grieved at the position his father occupied, but on grounds very different to those his brother held. The ruling principle of his life was that which is the ruling principle of so many, selfishness. It assumes, as do all things evil, a myriad disguises. In his case he called it, and perhaps believed he rightly called it, ambition—that voice, which he was so fond of speaking of, within his breast, which told him that in the future he should do great things. It was only now and then that his selfish soul peeped out, for though his life was, consciously or not, dedicated to himself, when he liked his manners were so winning, his tongue so eloquent, and his face so fair, that people wholly occupied with the exterior, forgot to examine what was within. In his eyes his father's conduct was selfishness personified ; he never stopped to consider who was the wiser, the father or the son, but, after the manner of his kind, he at once agreed that he whose views were not his own must of necessity be wrong. None the less, and though

he was firmly resolved that nothing should induce him to make his father's way his own, his conscience pinched him when he saw the old man's sorrow, and how greatly he was changed. In a curiously unreal fashion tender-hearted, although he had been, and still was, the cause of it, he grieved to see his father's grief. Therefore, actuated by a sort of mock remorse, his demeanour was meek and gentle, and he strove to be pleasant unto all; aware too, that now his brother had put his hand unto the plough, he would drive straight on, and not stay until he had cut the furrow, he felt that he might delicately shift the action on to his shoulders, and pose as a passive if agreeing agent in his hands.

Thus the attitude of these two was one of sympathy, but not of acquiescence; they were sorry for their father's trouble, but not so sorry that they would yield an inch to remove the cause of it. With their sisters, sorrow assumed a more practical form; so distressed were they, that they yearned with all their hearts for that reconciliation which would bring peace again. And to this end they resolved to seek an interview with the two lads, and so work upon their hearts that they

should be melted back to obedience and love again.

Now these girls were sisters of whom any might be proud, and they loved their brothers with all their heart and soul; loving their father too, it seemed to them a bitter thing that between those whom they loved so well there should be strife instead of harmony. Crediting themselves with persuasive powers, it further seemed to them that what really was the cause of this falling out between the father and his sons was that neither side completely understood the other, and in their sweet wise way they determined that they would take advantage of the first occasion to instruct these rebellious youths up to the full measure of their own superior understanding.

Mary was the eldest. She was a very angel of the home. She was tall and very fair; her hair was golden, and defied all efforts of the brush to keep it straight; it would crimple, and the waving, laughing tresses would scorn all sense of order; how often Mary's hand would steal up to her brow to brush away the rebel lock which would trespass upon another's ground! For it was not fair that it should seek to hide that pleasant

brow, which was so smooth and white, denoting truth and honesty as plainly as though the words were written there. Her eyes were merry, laughing eyes, those eyes which are infectious in their gaiety, and which it is a hard heart which looks upon and does not love. Her nose was small, a tiny Roman, in the fashion of her brother John's, but on a smaller scale; it gave her face the firmness which it needed, showing that this damsel, despite her laughing eyes and laughing hair, had a determination and a force of character which were all her own, a showing which was well seconded by her mouth and chin, which though tender were still strong.

Alice was her graver half—the ideal daughter of a father's heart. Her face was full of love. God, whose name is Love, in His Almighty love peoples with not a few such faces a struggling world. You knew at once, when you looked upon this girl, that here was one who would merge all thought of self in her unceasing thought for others. That is the epitome of love, and that was her practice in her daily life. She was two years her sister's junior, and not quite so tall. She was dark, while her sister was so fair, with great brown

eyes, very thoughtful, and very tender too. She was not beautiful in the common acceptation of the word. But if we are to judge a face by the tale it tells, then hers was beautiful indeed. There was gentleness in every line of it, and power too, and that power which the truly gentle nature exercises over every other with which it comes in contact, and which is not wholly bad; that refining influence which, insensibly exerted though oftentimes it is, does influence coarser natures in a wondrous way. With all her gravity, she was not austere, but had the rare faculty of shedding happiness on all around. One felt better in her presence, though one knew hardly why; and wherever she might go, peace and contentment seemed to follow in her train.

Mary was the sun, bright, merry, and strong. Alice was the cloud, with the sun behind. The earth was parched with thirst, and the cloud destroyed itself to minister unto its need; and by degrees, as the sweet, glad, grateful drops came falling one by one through the mist, the earth began to see that the cloud was melting into light, until all at once it woke to the consciousness that its wants were satisfied, and was surprised to find that, after all,

the glory of the sun was upon land and sky. Her gravity was but the cloak ; her heart was light and bright, and it was only when one knew her well that one perceived her gravity no more, but only the light, bright, true girl's heart within.

These two, communing with each other, grieving at the appearance of dissension where before was none, were assured, or deemed they were, that their sweet selves had but to pour balm upon the wounds, and they would heal, oil upon the troubled waters, and there would be no more storms. It was a goodly sight to see these lasses, in the silence of their chamber, when the night was still, nestling side by side, striving to acquaint each other how this sorrow might be turned to joy. And one would lay her head upon the other's breast, and they would muse a while ; and they would get their Bible and turn its wisdom-laden leaves, seeking that guidance which they longed to find. And they would read, as ofttimes they had done before, in the Gospel of St. Matthew, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest ;" and again, in the page of John, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified

in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in My name, I will do it." And they would go to Him, and kneel beside the snowy bed,

" . . . in the moonlight of the room,"

and offer their petitions to the King of kings, in the name of His dear Son. And especially they asked that, in their dealings with the two lads, He would be on their side.

And thus it fell. It was an evening like many they had known of late, glorious and calm. The sun was fading in his western bed, and the moon, long risen, was gathering strength as he sank low ; peace had come with even-tide, and the time stole on. The lads, wearied with the labours of the day, willing to be apart, had risen when the evening meal was done, and sought that seclusion which was well fitted to the hour.

The grass-field nearest to the farm rose in a gentle slope, and was crowned on the summit by a bower of trees. Here, also, was a little dell, which, in the days of spring, was the dwelling-place of many flowers. Here, too, in this time of summer the lads would love to wander, and seek rest awhile. How many an hour had they spent here, beneath the grateful

shadow of the trees, communing with their God, with their thoughts, or with their books. Hither, this summer night, they both repaired. The violets, the cowslips, and the primroses had long since gone, but the grass was as a verdant carpet, and on it they both lay down. They were in no mood for talking; Oliver lay on his back, his hat off, his hands beneath his head, his face turned towards the sky, seen through the glancing leaves; he was in the land of dreams, dreams whose realisation was perhaps farther from him than the stars. John reclined upon his side, his head resting on his hand; he too was wrapped in thought, but his thoughts were not like Oliver's; they were not of himself at all, but of the Lord, of His wonders and of His mercies; of the marvellous loving-kindness which he had shown to men, and the ingratitude which men had shown to Him; he had always in his mind that altar which was seen by Paul, *TO THE UNKNOWN GOD*, and mourned to think that any in these days should pretend that He was still unknown! To them, while they thus reclined and mused, their sisters came: the lasses took them unawares; they knew not that any one was near. While yet their

thoughts were far away, the girls came gently across the mead, and up the slope until they stood close by. John's back was turned to them, and Oliver gazed at the sky, so still they were not seen. Arm-in-arm the sisters stood looking down upon their brothers ; then Mary whispered something into Alice's ear, and each smiled at the words she said. Then they parted, and like two mice, or birds on silent wing, each stole unto a lad ; Mary unto John, Alice unto Oliver. And when each reached her quarry, each stooped with sudden swiftness, and put her arm about her brother's neck, and kissed him on the lips, and smiled, and laughed at him, for it was a huge joke to take them unawares. Whereat John and Oliver were much annoyed, but when they saw who these new-comers were, who took such tender vantage of their young manhood, they threw up their arms, and caught their sisters in their turn, and held them fast, and returned the kiss in kind. Then all laughed merrily, and they fell to talking of matters of all kinds.

But the girls had in their minds the purport of their coming ; and Mary, who had John's head pillowed on her lap, and with her fingers trifled with his hair, resolute to win him by

force of love if not by force of argument, stooped and kissed him once again.

“John,” said she, with that sweet archness which was befitting with her eyes, “John, do you love us much?”

Then John smelt a rat; for he was wise, and knew they knew he loved them much, and suspected that behind this question there was something more, but he was not to be beguiled.

“Do I love you much, you foolish sis of mine? What do you think that I should say—much or little? or if much, how much? for there are degrees of comparison in muchness; and I should find it hard to define the size of my love for you.”

“Then, John,”—and she was shy and arch as well, for though she loved her brother she stood in awe of him somewhat,—“if you have so much love for us that you cannot define its quantity, then you would please us if you could.” This maiden was a casuist, as, alas! some are, and approached by crooked roads the goal which she was aiming for. But John was too wise for her; he suspected all the more that this sweet innocence was seeking to entangle him in webs before he knew that

they were spreading; so while she spoke him gaily, he replied with gravity, for which she was not quite prepared.

“I would please you, sis, in all I could, you know it well; but do not misinterpret what I say. I suspect, sis, that you have come upon an errand of your own, that you have come to ask from me a boon before you have considered well whether it is one that I should grant. You would not have me forsake what I believe to be my duty to the Lord to show my love for you?” Then she knew her purpose was discovered, and she sighed.

“But, John—John, are you sure that you are right and I am wrong? are you sure that it is your duty to the Lord to—to break our father’s heart, he has been so good to you—to us?” and already her eyes were filled with tears; “and he is an old man now; you would not send his grey hairs in sorrow to the grave; is that your duty to the Lord?” Great tears fell upon his upturned face. He roused himself to sit upright and answer her.

“Mary, I grieve as much as you for any trouble of our father’s, but you must not confuse the point at issue in your grief. All my

life, as I think that you have known, I have striven to find the way in which I best could serve the Lord; and the chief question is, though you know I love our father, not whether he grieves or joys, but whether that way is found. I have long had the matter in my mind, I have taken it often to the Lord, I have counted the cost, and for many and weighty reasons I believe it is; even father does not hint that it is not, he will not speak at all; he simply says, as I understand it, that he hoped I would be a farmer because he is one and because his fathers were. If it were only a question of pleasing him I would yield, even though I doubted the wisdom of his choice, but it is not; in my heart I believe, and he has never said a word to alter my belief, that farming is not that walk in life in which I best could use my powers for the service of the Lord. In this case, Mary, what would you have me do?"

Then she knew that her cause was lost, and that further strife was vain, and that reconciliation would never come; at least, that it would not come as she had hoped it would; but she uttered no reproach, but kissed her brother once again.

Meanwhile Alice on her side fared no better than her sister did, though Oliver's reasons were less rational than John's, and were plainly founded rather on his own desires than on aught else. Some attempt he made to hide the selfishness which was in his heart, but Alice's keen sense was not slow in detecting the real motive which ruled him now; the lad was restless, simply tired of his life here, and, regardless of what others might think or feel, bent on cutting himself free from all associations of the past. Thus she found that by her action, instead of lessening, she had increased her pain; for though she had long suspected that in Oliver's eyes number one came first, and all else long afterwards, she had never been assured of it before to-night; now there was no room for doubt, and the knowledge that her much-loved brother was made of such poor clay after all, brought another pang to her soft heart. But she gave no sign of it. A true woman has a great power of concealing sorrow; she will wear out her heart for one she loves, and yet never let the unobservant world perceive her woe. So Alice still spoke gently to Oliver, and showered on him fresh evidences of her love, though all

the time she thought that he was not what she would have him be was weighing like a load upon her heart.

But it was only when the night had really come, and they retired to their rest, that each let the other see the trouble that was in her breast. Alice being seated on the bed, Mary came and flung herself upon the ground, and laid her face upon her lap, and burst into a flood of tears; for though she was the elder, the brighter, and the stronger, in all times of doubt or sorrow it was to Alice she would come, and not Alice unto her. And Alice, though her own heart was heavy, laid her soft hand upon her sister's head, and sought to comfort her; and the words of the Revelation of John were first upon her lips: "God shall wipe away all tears . . . and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.' Do not cry, Alice, all will be right at last. 'We know that all things work together for good to them that love God;' if we leave them unto Him, we need have no fear."

Mary knew it, as we all do in our hearts; but though we know it, there are times when tears will start to our eyes, and our hearts

will wax heavy ; but it is our business to see that this natural impulse of our poor, weak natures in no way assumes the shape of rebellion to His will.

“ I had hoped so much from their love for us ! ” was Mary’s cry. “ I did think that we could do more than it seems we can ! ” And so, at times, we think too. We are very fond of thinking that it is our business to improve the world ; and so indeed it is, if we only set about it in the right way. It is the glorious duty of every Christian to improve, if possible, his fellow-creatures ; but our mistake consists in that we are apt to think that it is for us to rule the progress of events, imagining, in all sincerity, that we know what is the best order they should take ; and if they are not exactly what we should like to see them, we repine, and think that all is wrong. If so, then we are repining because things do not fall out our way, but the Lord’s. Rest assured that He ordereth all things well ; and if we do not see exactly how things are ordered well, it is because our sight is finite, and not like His, omniscient and infinite.

“ I think I too had some such hope, ” said Alice in reply to Mary ; “ but even if our

hopes are disappointed, it is the Lord's doing, and we know that it is better so." It would be a good thing if we could all realise that knowledge, that it is not only well if our hopes are disappointed, but that it is better so ; if they are, then it is right that they should be, and the Lord is actually helping us against our own desire. At all such times we should do what those two girls did then.

"Don't you think," said Alice, when they had been still a while, "that we ought specially to thank the Lord to-night, more even than we sometimes do, for in our ignorance we wished for something which was contrary to His will, and He has saved us from the consequence of our want of knowledge?" And ought we not to thank him too, for how often are we exactly in the same case?

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE SILENCE OF THE NIGHT.

THAT same night old John Freeman and his wife were considering the trouble which lay upon their daughters' minds. For some cause the old man could not rest; as a rule, no sooner had he laid his head upon the pillow, and finally committed himself throughout the night to God, than, worn out by the labours of the day, he was visited by that refreshing sleep which he had duly earned. But latterly this had not been so frequently the case. The mind is of primary importance in the constitution of the body; if it is ill at ease, then the body is uneasy too. As with John Freeman. Being, perhaps for the first time in his whole life, really uneasy in his mind, he was uneasy in his body too, and could not, or only with great difficulty, find that rest which is God's great gift to wearied man.

But this night in particular he was in a restless mood. All day long his uneasiness had been gathering strength, and this was the more remarkable because in general he was so calm and quiet, resting in the Lord. There is the secret ; we must be at peace so long as we are resting in the Lord, but so soon as peace departs from us, then it is plain, upon the face of it, that we cannot be resting upon the Lord, but on our own support, which is not equal unto His. John Freeman could not sleep. He had been later than usual before he retired to bed, and had sat long, smoking in his chair, with his wife sitting at his side ; it was a weary time for her, for he had sat in moody silence, lost in the contemplation of his troubles. It had cut her to the heart to see how changed he was, though, after the manner of her sex, she had striven to conceal all sign of sorrow, fearful that, by showing it, she would but add to his. And indeed he was but the wreck of what he used to be ; it was not only the lapse from comparative juvenility to the sere and yellow leaf of age ; an old man, whose perfect trust is in the Lord, is very far from being a mournful spectacle ; despite his age, he is still happy, happier even than of

yore, the shadow of what is near at hand glorifies his furrowed face; but at present, with old John Freeman, this was not the case. He was not happy, nor did the near presence of his God shed glory on his face; and by consequence he presented that sight which is a mournful one indeed; the decrepitude of age, without the suggestion of its rejuvenescence, its helplessness without its hope. The old man sat, one arm resting on either side of his chair, crouching in its furthest recesses, his head fallen forward on his chest, his face eloquent of utter weariness both of mind and body. Thus for hours together he sat, looking into space, which was not peopled with the bright conceptions of his brain, but which, no matter how long he looked, was still void and empty in his woe; it is ominous of a man's condition if he can look into vacancy, and yet look, while time flies on, and still see nothing there.

Now and then his wife had spoken to him, thinking that any conversation would be better than the misery which was self-evident; but her efforts had been vain. If he heard, he gave her no reply, and when she laid her hand upon his shoulder to seek to rouse him

from his seeming stupor, with a pettish gesture he had dismissed her from him.

And now that the silence of the night had come, his uneasiness of mind had become uneasiness of body too; he could not sleep. For their evening chapter he and his wife together had read the thirty-seventh Psalm; not seldom they would choose a psalm with which to close the day; and he had paused very markedly at several verses which he seemed to think had a special application to his case: "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him," was one; he even read the words twice over. "Cease from anger, and forsake wrath," was another; then at those three grand ones which speak such comfort to the souls of men: "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and He delighteth in His way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with His hand. I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." And again, "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace;" and at the end, "He shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, *because they trust in Him.*" These last words

seemed to have gone home to his heart, and he repeated them once or twice as he was getting into bed.

“*Because* they trust in Him,” “because they *trust* in Him ;” ay, the Lord will deliver them, “because they trust in Him.” The old man repeated them again and again, laying emphasis now on this word and now on that, as though he desired to get all the full truth which they contained.

His wife said nothing, but when they had given each other a good-night kiss,—for it was the invariable custom of those old folk to be to each other as though they still were young, and man and wife of yesterday,—she lay very still in bed, and thought of the effect that weighty sentence seemed to have upon her husband’s mind ; at her back he who was as a rule so quiet and so soon asleep, tossed and tumbled, and she knew that he was ill at ease. She thereupon resolved that she would keep awake until her husband was at rest, for she felt anxious, though she knew not why, at his disquietude. But she found that her desire was greater than her strength, and after battling with sleepiness for what seemed hours, but were, in reality, but minutes, at last she

sank to rest with the opening words of the evening hymn,

“Glory to Thee, my God, this night,
For all the blessings of the light,”

upon her tired lips. Well might her husband at her side have offered up the prayer contained in another verse of the same hymn :

“When in the night I sleepless lie,
My soul with heavenly thoughts supply ;
Let no ill dreams disturb my rest,
No powers of darkness me molest.”

But the words of no hymn were at that moment foremost in his mind, for all his thoughts were of the Psalm which he had read : “Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright ; for the end of that man is peace.” Was he a perfect man ? or was he upright ? If so, then would his end be peace ; but if not, then would his end be—what ? he trembled as he thought of it. “Cease from anger, and forsake wrath.” Was that what he was doing ? was it, in any sense, what he was doing ? or, rather, was it not precisely the opposite course he was pursuing ? “Conscience makes cowards of us all,” and he was conscience-stricken now.

The moon was in the heavens ; though the

blind was down he lay so that a shaft of pure light, stealing past it, gleamed upon his troubled face; and as he looked up whence this ray came, he caught a glimpse, in the cloudless skies, of the orb of night, the twinkling stars, and the myriad glories of the summer night, the symbols of His love in heaven, and the soft splendour of the time had a chastening influence upon his troubled mind, and like the water sweeps across the dam, came a flood of memories of the past—that past when the lads were still so young, and when he, in his paternal love and pride, formed such bright dreams of their future as he would have it be; then of that after-past, when they were growing up to manhood, and his dreams grew with them, and how, throughout the years, they had been obedient to his will, how they had done him good service, and how he had never had a fault to find. They were men now, young, perhaps, but still near manhood's years; and was this his gratitude for all they had done now that their time had come? Such a thought had never occurred to him before, that he owed them any kind of gratitude, that he could owe them any kind; unconsciously he had been wont to think that all the grati-

tude was owed to him ; to look upon his side of the question only, on them as parts of himself, and that therefore necessarily all his wishes must be theirs. It is well if this be so, it is a good thing for a good son to follow in a good father's steps, and so take him as his model ; but it by no means follows that the imitation need be slavish. A wise father will rejoice to see his son rear the structure the foundation of which he has builded, and a wise son will do well to remember that such a desire is highly to be commended, as being both lawful and expedient. Let him be sure that his ground is good before he disappoints that desire, that he does so in no spirit of unrighteous disobedience ; for though it will be allowed that there are varied courses of conduct which are equally good, let there be no doubt of the goodness of another before we adopt it in the place of one whose goodness is undoubted ; it is a perilous thing to chop and change, for it is the weaker, that is to say baser, sorts of nature which are prone to change. That son also will do well to remember that when he is a father in his turn his father's case will be his own ; he too will desire his son to rear the structure on whose foundation he

has spent his years, and for whose sake he forsook his father's paths, and if his son will not, his disappointment will be equally keen as was his father's in his time. But though it is agreed that it is a good thing for the son to continue the work his sire has begun, a wise father will be very careful to observe that this is not essential, and that in things non-essential there may be differences of opinion and yet no fault.

Thus for the first time it began to dawn on old John Freeman that gratitude is, or ought to be, a mutual feeling: that no man has a right to a monopoly, that no man can say, "You have everything to be grateful for to me, and I have nothing to be grateful for to you." In the true spirit of the teaching of Christianity, such a thing is utterly impossible; for, to go no further, we ought to be grateful if we are able to do another a service, if an exceptional opportunity comes in our way for us to show our obedience to the law of God. Further than this, we cannot truly have taken up our cross and be following Him, if we say that such and such an one ought to be grateful unto us. Our chief desire ought to be to do our duty in the sight of God. We

cannot do more than our duty ; and if we do it all in the meek and gentle spirit meet for the followers of Christ, we have so much cause to be grateful on our own account that it will be out of the question for us to think of charging ingratitude to others. And to go into this matter further still, he to whom we do service does a service unto us, by enabling us to do a service unto him ; and thus we are actually benefited by his act. If our action be of God, then it is at his own awful peril if he is not grateful unto God. But so also is it at our own peril if we are not grateful too. We cannot too strongly impress upon ourselves that Christ's was a self-denying spirit, and ours must be a self-denying spirit too ; for, paradoxical though it seems, by denying ourselves we consider ourselves in the highest sense of consideration.

Thus, once more, for the first time it began to dawn upon John Freeman that not only did his sons owe gratitude to him, but that he owed gratitude to them as well ; and it seemed to him that it was a very poor way of showing his gratitude—which perhaps, after all, in a certain sense, is sympathy—to pursue the course of conduct he was doing now. His

heart yearned towards his boys—there, as he lay still in bed, observant of the radiance of the moon, his heart yearned towards his boys; he could not bear to think that there should be strife between his sons and him. All these years there had been peace, and now that the years were nearly done, and his race was nearly run—should there be strife in this last hour? He had waited and watched for his Lord to come, and had kept his lamp well burning, and now that the Lord indeed was coming, was his oil all gone, and his lamp gone out for ever? He could not bear to think of it.

Very quietly he rose out of bed, and, creeping to the window, pulled up the blind. The moon filled the chamber with her silvern light; but he was careful not to rouse his wife, and she still reposed in dreamless slumber. A chair stood near the window, and by it the old man knelt down; and the moonbeams, shining on his old worn face, seemed to discover in it a newer beauty and a younger charm. Then he knelt and prayed; with clasped hands resting on the chair, with bowed form and white-robed figure, the old man poured out his soul to God. Of the

manner of his prayer no matter. That is a weighty moment in the life of a man, whether old or young, when, seeing that he is or has been wrong, he throws himself upon the mercy of his God for help, comfort, and forgiveness. That is even, if possible, a weightier moment, when, as in the case of this old man, he has seen the hopes of his life blighted; the tree which he has watered and tended throughout the long past years, until at last he has come to look upon its existence as bound up in his, and his in it, hewed down in the fulness of its prime. That is a grave moment when he prays the Lord's dear pardon because, in the first anguish of his sorrow, he could not cry, "Thy will be done!" Surely the man who does that, and does it in spirit and in truth, is very near indeed to heaven, and heaven is very near to him.

When he had prayed, he rose up refreshed. Having asked pardon of the Lord, it behoved him to seek His guidance, so that in the future he might do well. For this purpose he turned the pages of the great old Bible which stood on the table in front of the window, a mighty volume, recording on its fly-leaves, yellow with old age, family births, marriages, and deaths

for generations past. Bound in massive boards, covered with brown leather in a fashion long since out of date, this book had been the guide and comforter—the treasured heirloom bequeathed by father to son far down the years. Turning its time-worn pages, he lighted upon the first chapter of the Epistle General of James, and his eye was caught by the words, “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;” and then, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.” He, wanting wisdom, had asked in faith, and not as the wave driven by the wind and tossed, therefore he comforted himself by the reflection that it should be given him; and then, turning from the epistle to the twelfth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke, he read first the parable of the rich man and his barns, and also those words of Christ, which we all know so well, “Take no thought for your life. . . . But rather seek ye the kingdom of God,” with the injunction not to lay up our treasures on earth

but in heaven, because "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." He paused in bewilderment, as though the well-known words conveyed a new meaning to his mind. Surely this had been the very sin he had been himself committing; this sin, which all his life long he had been striving so earnestly against; surely his treasure must be laid up on earth, else how was it that he was so distressed about such a very earthly matter as the transferring of his farm from himself unto his sons? Could it be supposed that such a transaction was of near and pressing interest to God? Then the parable of the marriage feast and the guests, who all with one accord began to make excuse, flashed across his mind; was it possible that he was one like them? The bare possibility that such an application could refer to him astonished him, and in much perplexity he rose and began to walk about the room.

In rising he stumbled against a chair, and the noise it made roused his wife, who, sitting up in bed, was surprised to find him missing from her side, and in such evident distress of mind walking in the room. Alarmed, she cried—

“ My man, what is it ailing thee ? ” for she feared that his affliction might be bodily and mental too. But his answer surprised her even more.

“ My lass, dost thou mind the parable, how a certain man gave a great feast, and how the guests with one accord began to make excuse ? I am fearful that I am like unto them in this mine age.” And his tone showed that he indeed knew fear.

“ Thou, my man ! nay, not so ; ” and she rose to go to him. “ Say, John, hast not thou all thy days striven to obey His words, and walk righteously in His sight ? and what is it that affrights thee now ? ” For it was so new for him to be afraid that his alarm possessed her too.

“ My lass, see here ! ” and he led her to the table where the Bible was, and together they bent over the great book. ‘ Seek ye the kingdom of God . . . a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, . . . for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.’ I fear that my heart has been too much with my farm ; the lads are right and I am wrong. O lass ! this has been a great and bitter night to me ! ” And the old man broke forth into the fifty-first

Psalm—the Psalm of penitence, while his wife stood by his side, great hot tears falling on the open page, trembling so that he could hardly stand.

“ ‘Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy loving-kindness; according unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. . . . Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence; and take not Thy holy Spirit from me.’ ”

And when he had done speaking, and the last verse was ended, he turned unto his wife and said—

“ Wife, this has been a great night to me, the greatest I can call to mind; the Lord has been very good to me, in that He has opened mine eyes to perceive my sin. To think that I who am so near to God should be so far away; this is a teaching I had needs be taught. To-morrow the lads shall have their way, for theirs is right, and mine is wrong.”

His wife laid her head upon his bosom, and could not speak for tears.

“Why dost thou cry, my lass? here is no cause for grief but joy. Rather let us rejoice that He has made the blind to see, and the deaf to hear. Let us be mindful, since He has given us ears to hear, that we are doers of the word, and not hearers only.”

“My man,” said she, “I do not cry for grief, but joy.” Then she burst into tears again. “Oh, my man! my man! it was a great and grievous weight to me that between thy sons and thee there should be strife, or thought of it, for thou knowest they are good lads, and thou lovest them dearly, and they love thee dearly too.”

“Ay, they are dear to me as my own life, but dearer is the Lord; and surely it is no sin if they are wiser than such as I. Dry thy tears, my lass; we are old folk, we two; they are young, and still have some business with the world; but all our business now is with the Lord.”

Then he led her back to bed, and she went willingly with him; but when she lay once more between the sheets, she turned to him

and said, in trembling accents still, for she yet was half afraid—

“John, art thou sure there is nought in thy heart but joy? Be ye sure that the lads they will do well; and since they are our own, and to us so dear, can we do aught but rejoice in their well-doing? for in their well-doing we, too, do well.”

“Be easy, wife; thou must leave me to my God. Yet a little while and I shall be with Him, and He will give me all the joy I need.”

Then her hand stole towards his, and he held it in his fervent grasp; but she noted how hot his hand was, and how it shook as though it rested on the bed; and she sighed, for still his heart was not entirely at ease. Silently they lay; neither spoke, though neither turned to sleep, for the thoughts of each were far away.

“Mary,” said he, in a gentle voice, when they had been some time silent, “do you mind how Jesus said, ‘Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth give I unto you?’ It may be that His peace He will give unto us, not as the world willeth, but as He will, for ‘the peace of God,

which passeth understanding,' hath nought to do with farms, or with the world at present, but with the world that is to be; and if we are at peace with the lads, and they are at peace with us, surely our peace is whole."

"Indeed they are at peace with us; it is the fear that we are not disposed towards them which is troubling their hearts. John is altered much of late, and he will rejoice to learn that thou forgivest him."

"Forgiveness is of God," said he, when there had been another pause. "Who am I that I should not forgive? or what has he done that he should not be forgiven? He is right and I am wrong; I have always had it in my mind that he is wiser than am I, and now I am assured that it is so."

"My man, thou hast been a good man to me, and to thy boys. I cannot tell thee how dearly I rejoice to know that there will be an end of strife between thee and them."

"My lass," said he, "be thou at ease. I love them dearly too; they are stronger than am I; and since we have agreed till now, we must not disagree at last."

And then he kissed her on the brow, and she kissed him too; and after that they composed themselves to rest, and slept quietly until the morning came; and the Lord was with them while they slept.

CHAPTER X.

HARVEST HOME.

THE next day passed as usual ; the last of the corn was nearly reaped, and to-night the last load would be gathered in. John Freeman and his wife were later than usual in rising from their bed. As a rule, despite the number of their years, the habits of their youth were with them still, and they were up almost with the first dawn of day ; but the case was an exceptional one—it was late before they fell asleep indeed, and even by overstaying their usual hour they did not have the amount of rest they were wont to have. The old man had decided that nothing should be said unto his sons until the evening came.

“This night,” said he, “the harvest, which the Lord has once more given, will all be garnered. It is a time of joy ; the lads will rejoice with us, and we with them ; at such a

time it will be well that their joy be made complete."

His wife said nothing; his tone was stronger than it had been of late, and her heart was stronger as she noted it. It is strange how keen is the observation of those who love; how the slightest shades of feeling are observed in those beloved; how the heart keeps time with every beat of another which is dear to us; how instinctively we look into another's breast, and how our own is like a mirror, in which, and by which, we know what passes there. And if our love is thus observant, what must be the love of God? We are told that not a sparrow shall fall to the ground without our Father knowing it, that the very hairs of our head are numbered; conceive—we cannot fully, but what a conception even ours may be—what is meant by such a love as that of God. It is impossible to over-estimate how dear we are to Him individually, and therefore in the mass; every instant of our lives, every impulse of our hearts, every thought, asleep or waking, is watched by Him. He bore our sorrows, He knew more than mortal pain. Consider what is meant by the bare statement of the wondrous truth that His heart beats in

perfect and continual sympathy with every beat of ours : our joys are His, His our sorrows; He weeps with us, with us rejoices; in a tremendous sense our sins are His, for every time we sin it is as though we added another thorn unto His crown, and with it pierce His bleeding brow.

In ignorance of what had passed in the silence of the night, the day went by with John and Oliver as so many had gone before. It was a busy time with them. Up with the lark, they had breakfasted and were in the fields before their father had appeared. Work kept them later than was generally the case; and when they came they found that he had gone to make final preparations for the harvest-home, which, as always was the case with them, was to commemorate the ingathering of the last load. Far from idling, they rather worked the more, because of the differences between him and them. Even Oliver worked well. Though he strove to deny it to himself, he felt the change which had come over his father in these latter days as a personal reproach. In his own way he was tender-hearted, though his tenderness was but skin-deep after all; and it troubled him not a

little to see how his father had all at once grown old. It was as a sort of peace-offering that he now worked hard. It was the least which he could do ; for though nothing was further from his mind than to accept any sort of peace other than that which came from his having his own way, still he was prompted by a desire to prove by his manifest good works that the fault, if any, was with his father, and not with him.

It was as the day was waning that the explanation came. The whole house was in a bustle. Every one was making ready for the feast, when the two lads, coming in to change their dress so as to do due honour to the occasion, were hailed by their mother, who was standing in the porch.

“Lads,” she cried, “I want to speak to ye.” She herself was decked in splendour. All the glory of her Sunday robes was on her now. The black-silk dress, of the stiffest and richest silk, which had seen many and many a year, and which still looked almost like new, lent to her homely person a new magnificence ; while the dainty white lace cuffs and collar, her daughters’ gifts to her, and which she had only consented to receive and wear because

they were the work of their own hands, gave to her silver locks and sweet old face a freshened charm. Her magnificence compelled her to be idle; which her daughters foreseeing, they had induced her to dress long before there was need for it, determined that she should rest, and not be wearied before the actual business of the night began. She formed a dainty picture, standing in the old-time porch, so sweet and neat and dainty. The knowledge that the breach between her husband and her sons would soon be healed filled her heart with joy, so that the rare happy smile lit up her countenance which had been so seldom seen on it of late. Seeing which, John doffed his hat, and advanced in greeting, with Oliver close on his heels.

“Mother, what a grand dame you are! I fear to touch you with my hands; but I’ll trespass with my lips instead.” And bending forward he kissed her on the brow. She put her arm about his neck, and held him there, and kissed him back again. Then loosing him, she answered, looking at him with the love-light of her eyes—

“John,” said she, “you must grow shorter, You are too tall for me to hold.”

Laughing, he gave way to Oliver, who came pressing to the front.

“Mother,” he said—his eyes flashed, and he shook his handsome head—“I am the right size for you. You can put the whole of me into your heart and keep me there.” And without more ado he pressed her in his arms and kissed her tenderly. “If you will be grand,” he then went on, “if you will be grand, ’tis at your own risk, for despite your grandeur I will kiss you when I will.”

“Ay, Ollie,” said she, using the diminutive for him, which she had not done for John, “thou wert headstrong ever, and ’twas hard to keep thee from having thy own way.”

Then she smoothed her ruffled plumes, and set her lace collar with propriety. Then, while they were lingering still,

“My lads,” she said—and they noted that she did not look up at them this time, but spoke with her eyes bent down, while she arranged her cuffs—“thy father waits to speak to thee. He has something which he wishes much to say. Will ye go to him?”

“Surely, mother,” answered John, surprised to see that his mother waited, as though such a matter could for a moment be in doubt.

His eyes met Oliver's, and they exchanged a meaning glance, each wondering in his heart what their father wished to say.

"My lads," their mother continued, while they hesitated whether to go or stay, "my lads, ye know not what is the love your father bears to you. Next to the Lord, ye are nearest to his heart. Be good lads to him. Ay, be good lads, and the Lord will bless ye all your days."

"Mother," was John's reply, "do we not know our father's love, and have we no love for him? Bear with us a while. If for the present our love does not seem so great as indeed it is, wait until time proves that it is true."

And with that they passed from the porch, and left their mother standing there. As they were going through the passage, Oliver spoke to John beneath his breath—

"What is the matter now, I wonder? Surely we are going to have no more unpleasantness on such a night as this." His tone was scarcely pleasant—different to that in which he had addressed his mother but a minute back. But there was no time for John to say much in reply.

“I do not think you have much cause for fear; but if there should be, as you call it, any more unpleasantness, I trust that you will leave me to deal with it.”

They found their father in the room in which he best liked to be; he too was in his best, and as they entered, with his hands behind his back was pacing restlessly to and fro. The great Bible lay open on the table, and they noted that his figure had regained something of its old erectness; while on his face, as he turned to look at them, was a calm, contented look, very different to that dreamy look of utter weariness it had so lately worn.

“My lads,” he said, as they came in, and even the tone of his voice was changed for the better, “I am glad to see ye both.” It was some time since he had confessed to any such emotion, so that the words were noticed too. “It’s been on my mind to speak a word to ye this good while now, and now I thank the Lord that my time has come.” He paused, and they stood and waited.

“John—Oliver,”—standing with his back to the window, he held out his hands to them,—“give me your hands awhile.” Silently they

crossed, and put their hands in his. "My lads," and his tone was softer now, "since ye were young, scarce reaching to my knee, ye have been good sons, and I have not needed to reproach ye once. Ye know I have had my dreams, ay, and as I am old they have grown with my years, and although now it comes to me that they were not all wise, I wist not then; the Lord has put away my ignorance; and though I am old, yet my dreams were young, and it is harder to put them from us in our age than when the years are as nothing on our heads. If, therefore," and there was a strange humility in his tone, which cut them to their hearts, "if, therefore, I have seemed hard to ye, I did but seem, for indeed I never wished you aught but good; for ye are dear to me as my own life, my lads! my lads!"

"Father," said John, compelled to break the silence which ensued, for Oliver could do nothing but hang his head as overcome by sudden shame, "as though we were ignorant of that; our fear was that you would doubt us. We never doubted you."

"I do not think I doubted ye." The father's eyes were fixed with grave tenderness

upon the face of his elder son. "'Twas hardly that, rather 'twas that I did not know ye well. It has come to me that two may live together for years in harmony and love, yet neither know the other at the end; that was my mistake with ye. I judged you to be as I, and I as ye. I need give thanks that, ere it is too late, the Lord has opened mine eyes that I may see."

Silence once more; then, when he spoke again—

"My lads, be it with ye as ye would; your ways shall be as my ways, the Lord grant that mine shall be as yours, 'for whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.' What recks it what path we choose to tread, so that it but leads to Him? My hopes ye wot of, they were but mine; my days are gone, ye are wiser than was I; and since whether ye live, ye live unto the Lord, or whether ye die, ye die unto the Lord, what recks it if the hopes are yours or mine?"

He ceased; but though he asked the question as though the answer were assured and plain, they knew that it had troubled him to

find ; they knew that although he strove to speak lightly of the hopes which he had had, and which would remain but hopes unto the end, the knowledge that they were never to reach fruition was to him as though the iron had entered into his soul. And as it is peculiar to our nature, if there still be any good in us, to be more sensitive to submission than to victory, by the old man's surrender—he who was their father, he on whom they had looked with reverence from their cradle until now—by his surrender of all he greatly cherished, all he held most dear, they were vanquished as they had not thought they could have been. In that first moment it almost seemed to them that his submission was more than they could bear, and it was on their lips to cry out and say, “Not our will, father, but thine be done.” But it might not be : the die was cast ; as they had made their bed, so they must lie. For the first time the fulness of the responsibility he had voluntarily assumed dawned on Oliver's mind, and an unspoken prayer rose from his heart, that God might see that he had chosen well ; while to John, as the old man stood before him there, the words of the Psalmist came with sudden force,

“The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me. I found trouble and sorrow;” but as he thought of them, he thought of the context too, and how strikingly it applied to his father now. Surely with David he could say, “Then called I upon the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul;” for it was his custom always to call upon God in all times of joy or sorrow, of rejoicing or distress.

“Father,” said John, after an interval of silence, in low tones which yet were unfaltering and clear, “you know that I speak truly when I say that I grieve to cause you sorrow, but to the best of my ability I have sought the Lord, and I think that in this which I am doing I best do His will.”

But Oliver, when he spoke, burst into tears. He was soon touched either to tears or laughter; but, like the April sky, no mood stayed with him long; moreover, his emotions being transitory, lay on the surface, and were quickly to be seen. Now, while the scalding tears dropped on his father’s hand, and his voice shook with the distress he could not command—

“Father,” he cried, “forgive me! I did not

mean to trouble you! I did not think you would feel it as you do!"

How often is that the cry of such as he; how often is that the exclamation of the shallow heart, "I did not mean to trouble you! I did not think you would feel it as you do!" In effect we say it even to the Lord, "I did not mean!" and "I did not think!" So might our first parents cry, they did not mean to greatly sin; so might Cain; so might all the countless myriads who have disobeyed the Lord. First we disobey, then we profess surprise that we were ever disobedient; we did not mean to disobey, we did not think what the results would be. It is what the child says who has done wrong, "I did not mean to do;" but what avails the child's excuse for us? Can we, in any sense, plead ignorance? God, who is no respecter of persons, may not be trifled with; it is at his own awful peril who attempts it; we know the path which we should tread; if it is not always clear, we have but to ask His help and He will make it plain to us. He stands in tremendous peril who, straying from it, pleads as an excuse that he did not mean to do so, or that he did not think what the results would be.

Some such thoughts as these passed through old John Freeman's mind as he listened to his son's cry. It was a pitiful tale; for it was certainly of no matter what he had meant or thought, it was what he had done with which they had to deal. The few words gave the father a clearer insight into his son's character than ever he had had before; and as he saw what indeed he was, his heart was touched with a strange pity, and his own trouble passed from his mind.

"Ollie!" he said, and his tones were sweet and gentle, "what does that matter now? what need hast thou of my forgiveness? All that is past; pray God we may know each other better in the days to come."

He led them to the table where the great Bible lay. Oliver's eyes were almost dry again, but John still was grave and calm. The book lay open at the twenty-first chapter of the Revelation of St. John; turning to them, he said—

"What matters to me all these things? Rather with John do I soon hope to see a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth shall be passed away, and there will be no more sea; and I shall trust

with mine eyes, which shall be no longer old, but young again, to behold 'the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.'"

And he read on, they listening as he read, Ollie's tears again falling on the open page, "And God shall wipe all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away.'" Then, with loving emphasis, he dwelt on the description of the heavenly Jerusalem, how it shall be; then, passing on to the last chapter, he read from the seventeenth verse unto the end: "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. . . . And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so come, Lord

Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.' ”

When he had finished reading, he spoke to them, saying, “The time is passing, the night draws nigh, get ye ready for the feast ; I shall be with ye there.” Then they went softly from the room, leaving him alone ; and as they went they saw the old man kneel by the table on the floor, and bow his head upon the Book in silent prayer.

“I wish,” said Oliver to John, when they were alone in John’s bedroom, “I wish that I had never wished to go ! Whoever would have thought he would have taken it like this ? ”

“It is too late for wishing now,” said John, in his grave tone. “It only remains for you and I to show that our wish was justified ; to prove that it was no mere whim, that it was the outcome of our earnest prayers, that it was built on rock and not on sand. Ollie, let us promise to stand by each other through good report and evil, trusting in the Lord.”

And he held out his hand for Oliver to grasp ; but Oliver turned away, and did not take it into his. His was one of those not uncommon natures which shrink from too much

earnestness; in their eyes real strength of will and resolution of purpose frightens rather than reassures. So Oliver, with a petulant gesture, turned aside, and did not take his brother's proffered hand.

“Why do you talk like that? you always try to make things look as gloomy as you can, as though it was such an awful thing to dislike farming; it is bad enough from father, but it is a good deal worse from you.”

John looked at him in silence. He knew his brother so well that he was not surprised at such a speech from him; he knew that it was practically impossible to induce him to look at life with earnestness; that earnestness and gloom were synonymous to him; that he could not understand that there was any difference between being grave and being sad. With such natures what can be done? with the man, whether young or old, who, being possessed of all his faculties—or presumably possessed of all of them—will persist in regarding life as one long puppet-show, as a plaything, which, being played with while it lasts, is of no account when thrown away or lost—what can be done save plead for him before the throne of God? Man is practically helpless;

we can but leave him to the Lord, as John did now. Being in no mood to bandy words or arguments, he moved away, and left his brother to his own reflections, which Oliver seeing, crossed the room and went into his own.

Then John did as he had seen his father do, knelt by his bed, and prayed. It was, he knew, a critical moment in the lives of all of them. They were stepping from the past and known to the future and unknown. The "former things were passed away;" new conditions would take their place from now. He well knew how much he needed, how much they all needed, the guiding and restraining influence of God. With all his heart he prayed that they might have it then.

It was a goodly sight that night, when they were gathered for the harvest home. The great barn was full as it could hold. All the labourers, with their wives and children, were gathered there. There were two tables running side by side, and from end to end; and there was not a vacant seat at either. All were glad and merry, as indeed they well might be; the harvest being garnered in, and success having crowned the labours of their

hands. Old John was there, and his wife, his daughters, and his sons; and none present could have guessed from their demeanour the thoughts which were foremost in their minds. From time immemorial nothing had disturbed the harmony and happiness of that great night. And old John Freeman was certainly not inclined to break in upon that rule now. So the feasters feasted, gay at heart, while their host and his family strove to hide from other eyes the thoughts which could not be hidden from themselves.

It was the custom on such occasions, the feast being done, for old John to say a few words to the assembled guests. And to-night the custom was, as usual, observed. None would have thought who saw the aged host standing at the head of the long table, or listened to his hearty words, that the hopes of his life had been so lately blighted; that even now the blight was on him still. It was not eloquent his speech, not as men phrase eloquence; though if that which cometh truly from the heart be eloquence, as some may think, then his words were tipped with fire. But only with his closing sentences have we to do. He was speaking of the harvest home,

how they rejoiced to see it come; and then went on to speak of the great ingathering which was at hand for some of them, and himself particularly.

“The fields were white unto the harvest, and now the corn is gathered in. These many years have we met beneath this roof, to rejoice that the harvest is brought home. Some have fallen by the way, and the Reaper has garnered them. And if, as it may chance, ere another harvest comes, I too am gathered home, it will be well. It will be the greatest of my harvest homes; for I shall leave behind me those I love, in the knowledge that in their proper time they too will have their great harvest home. I thank God, and pray Him that all of us may know that greatest of great days, a united harvest home.”

And his wife and his daughters, and John and Oliver, standing by, knew he wished them from his heart to understand that the past was past; that his hopes, being dead, were dead; and that in the future they must be a united family again. And with their hearts, if not with their lips, each said, Amen.

CHAPTER XI.

MIZPAH.

HAVING recognised the doing of a certain thing, although unpleasant, to be inevitable, we may say with Macbeth's guilty wife, "'Twere well done if 'twere done quickly." That man gains nothing who, knowing something must be done, puts the doing of it off from day to day because it is an unpleasant thing to do; he rather makes the unpleasantness doubly bitter. It would be well if this truth were fully understood by all of us; for it is strange how such simple and self-evident axioms as these are disregarded—in possible ignorance—by so many. We should not hesitate to classify that man who, by having his arm cut off, might save his life, yet hesitated—although he dearly wished to save it—to sacrifice his arm until his life was sacrificed as well; why then should we hesitate to classify him who, although he knows

that, until a certain thing be done, he will have no rest either in mind or body, yet postpones the doing until it is practically impossible for it to be done at all, and so the light goes out of his life for evermore? We easily see how this applies to others, less easily its application to ourselves; for it is a curious characteristic of our nature that we know, or fancy that we know, others better than ourselves; using in the one case a microscope, in the other the wrong end of a telescope. Self-examination is first advisable where we are first concerned. We would appear to studiously read the words: "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ," in perhaps the chief sense in which they were not intended to be read. There is a little further on another verse, which we are singularly inclined to overlook, or else, with marvellous perversity, to imagine contradicts the first. "For every man shall bear his own burden," as indeed he certainly shall; and if we were only to get those verses well by heart, and bear them constantly in mind, so that we might be "doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving" our own selves, it would help us materially in our endeavours to attain to the

full measure and standard of Christ and Him crucified.

Old John Freeman was not one to postpone the evil day ; he knew that what he had hoped was not to be, that his sons and he must part, and he deemed it better that the parting should not be postponed for the mere sake of the postponement. Besides, if one part of his hopes might not be realised, yet the other might ; for it was part and parcel of his loftiest dreams that he should see their stem planted in the ground, and flourishing like a green bay-tree before his time came for going home. For after all, his better self had triumphed, and since they would not consider him at all, he would consider them above himself.

With this end in view, active negotiations were set on foot for John and Oliver to take their places in that world, which, to the old man, was as an unknown sea, but into which they, with the hardihood of youth, had elected to go forth. So far as John was concerned, the matter was soon decided ; his plans were long since formed, he had not acted in haste. So far as in him lay, he had been careful not to take a leap in the dark, but had seen his way well in front of him in.

what he felt to be the critical moment of his life. The head of the engineering firm, of which we have previously spoken, and he had long been in correspondence, and he had now only to advise them that he was ready to occupy the post which was at all times ready for him to fill, and the matter was arranged at once.

But the difficulty was with Oliver. In spite of the fact that he had been the one to persistently press forward his desire to get away from home, it now became plain that he had but the faintest notions of what he should do when he was gone. Nothing with him was tangible. His father learnt more of his character in a week than he had done in all the years which had gone before, and he was grieved by his new knowledge.

“My lass,” he said to his wife one evening after another unsatisfactory intercourse with his second son, he having made one more vain attempt to learn what it was he had really set his heart on doing, “I misdoubt me whether, in this which I have done, after all I am not wrong. The lad Oliver is over young to stand alone. He knows not with certainty which way to turn,” and the old man sigh-

ing, dropped his head forward on his chest. "If he would but follow after John, all would be well. But never a John will be found in him."

His wife, who knew this perhaps better than he himself, held her peace a while, plying her knitting-needles busily. Then the mother's heart, sorrowing for and inclining to the younger son, and fearing above all things a breach between the father and the lad, sought to excuse him in the old man's eyes. So very gently she said—

"My man, does the Lord make two alike? But rest ye sure that He makes each one as He will; and though it may be hidden from our ken, there will be a place for each at last. The lad must bide His time. Maybe the Lord has His own time, which is not ours."

The old man thought a while. The moon began to shine across the distant fields. The room was half in shadow. It was that time in the early days of autumn when daylight lingers and fades in twilight gloom. This was very well what his wife was saying. No doubt the lad must bide the Lord's own time; but how could he tell if that time were now or never if he made no effort to inquire? More-

over, it jarred upon the old man's sense of right to think that any one should lie idly by, waiting for some unknown work to come. He was himself so practical that a dreamer was to his mind very near a fool—like that virgin who let the oil run from her lamp, so that when the great time came there was none in it, and her light was out. Why need he wait for work? Was it not man's place to work from morn till eve, from rising up to lying down? And was there not always work ready to his hand? And who was Oliver, that he should pick and choose; that he should call unclean what the Lord had called clean? For it began to dawn on old John Freeman that all honest work was honourable; and who was Oliver, that he should even imply dishonour, when dishonour there was none? But at the bottom of such like thoughts the suspicion lay uneasy on the old man's mind that Oliver had thrown up farming, had blighted the hopes which he himself had formed—not on any solid grounds, not on any reasonable grounds at all, but simply in the indulgence of a whim; and the thought that this was so was the bitterest of all. So he answered to his wife—

“Wife, we all need bide the Lord's own

time, but let us bide in readiness ; because we bide, need we be idle ? ‘ Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might,’ is it not straitly written ? My lass, I fear the lad loves not to work, but would rather idle. I pray God he may not be ever so ; for though he still be young, none is too young to incline his heart to diligence.”

Then his wife said, pausing in her work awhile—

“ Fear not, my man, we will take it to the Lord ; He orders all things well.” Then old John Freeman laid his hand on hers, and said no more.

None the less the future of the lad was on his mind, and on hers too. Nor was the burden lessened by his own behaviour ; for although his plans were shadows, and not real, still his impatience grew apace. Impatience is at all times a sign of mental, oftentimes also of moral weakness ; strength comes of knowledge. The man who, with the help of God, knows what he can do, knows not impatience ; he can afford to wait ; his is the key which is sure to unlock the gate of victory—patience. It is the man who is not conscious of his strength who frets and fumes, and reviles, in-

stead of using, the passing hours. So, although Oliver knew not what he should do when he had gone, still he was impatient not to stay; every day his haste grew more, while the chances of his speed grew less; he was as one who beats the air, and so wastes his strength without ever having met a foeman worthy of his steel.

John, it was arranged, should go up to town at once; there was no cause why he should stay, rather every cause why he should quickly go. The time now spent away from what he had elected should be the purpose of his life, was, on the face of it, time ill-spent. He saw this, and his father too; for in that respect they were alike, inasmuch that, a scheme being planned and well matured, they both believed that the shortest possible space of time should be allowed to lapse before its execution. John, therefore, was to go to town at once; and when Oliver learnt this, nothing would satisfy him but that he should go too. When it was suggested that this at least was premature, for he knew not whither he was going, in a burst of passion, which surprised them all—there being no cause for it—he declared that, willy-nilly, he would go, if not with their consent,

then lacking it, for he was a child no more, but of an age to guide himself, and his mind was made up to go with John to London, and go he would. After that it was agreed that he should have his way, his father only saying,

“Well, lad, be it as thou wilt, and the Lord be with thee; but take thou heed lest thou fallest, for I own that, for my part, thou art embarking on a dangerous enterprise. God guide thee into a haven of His own.”

Oliver said nothing; for his part, all that as yet he asked was that he should be allowed to go.

In all Scripture, in all poetry, in all romance, in all the world, parting is allowed to be practically synonymous with sorrow. He who plays upon the heart's pathetic chords, knows that parting is a note which seldom fails. Nor is it strange that this is so, for, as commonly interpreted, parting denotes division; and where is division is not joy, and where is not joy is sorrow. But it at least is doubtful whether it be wise to thus link tears and parting; in the highest sense there can be no doubt that we have no right to be sorrowful at anything but our own guilt, or that of others; but the fact remains, that to the sen-

timental, apart from the logical side of human nature, a parting, especially such an one as this, between aged parents and their children, who have never yet been parted, appears in a mournful aspect before all others. There would appear to be strings in the human heart which vibrate at they know not what ; the wind goes over them, even the faintest breeze, and they give tongue ; for on no other hypothesis is it possible to understand how a parting, which is for the better, should be regarded as being for the worse. That not uncommon person who, having to mourn and mourn, is always seeking something on which to vent his sorrow, who takes a pessimist view of mankind, whether individually or in the mass, who offers up his psalm of praise as though it were a dirge, is surely not a Christian in the best and truest sense. Christianity inspires happiness, not misery ; he is the truest follower of our dear Lord, who, as Shakespeare has it, sees good in everything. Coleridge not untruly says—

“ He prayeth best who loveth best
All things, both great and small ;
For the dear Lord, who loveth us,
He made and loves them all.”

Parting was soon to divide this simple

family, they who had never known what it meant before. There was, too, a feeling in the hearts of all, though they would not confess it, that in their case it meant more than separation; that it meant division in a sense in which they had hoped they would never be divided. Old John Freeman felt this most of all; it had been his hope in the first degree, and in the first degree its downfall affected him; yet his was the hardest struggle to deny its being. For, with that clear sight which distinguished him once more, he saw that nothing could be more useless, nothing more absolutely foolish, than regrets; "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Job's was the spirit which he would have wished to be his own. And as, veteran warrior though he was, he found it difficult to say it heartily, so he resolved that it should be easier before he made an end of trying.

As the day approached it was curious to observe the moods which held sway at the Daintree farm. Old John was valiant; let the battle in his breast be what it might, outside there was no sign of it; his figure was straighter than it had been for this long time,

his head was held aloft, and in his face and eyes was a calm look of resolution which seemed to raise him above their sphere, and in some quaint way to link him with things unseen. But his wife and her daughters were, as true women in such cases always are, in their sweet way, deceivers ever. God forgive them, for they meant no sin; nor was their deception hard to penetrate: they simply pretended that smiles were in their hearts, when tears were there. And the result was curious; it was like an April sky, which is inclined to rain, and which none the less the sun is struggling to shine through. They cried at times, for the tears would come, but very hard they pretended that they cried for joy and not for sorrow; for they feared that if it were seen they sorrowed, then the whole house would sorrow too; yet the sham was plain.

The day on which the lads went it rained. It was as the break-up of the fine weather which they had previously had. The heavens were heavy with clouds. A fine, cold rain fell fast, and a chill east wind seemed to sing the funeral song of summer. They were to go by an early train, and their father was to drive them to the station. They were to be alone

with him, so that all farewells must be said before.

They all rose that morning earlier than usual, and all were very still. Little was said, and that little with gravity, and half beneath their breath. There was no display of emotion of any kind. Oliver was the most affected. He was very pale, and could not keep still, but fidgeted here, there, and everywhere, in a childish fashion. But the rest were quieter than was as a rule the case, and gave no signs of what was in their mind.

They bid their mother good-bye at the farm-house door, and with just a simple word or two. But she, although it was but a few words she said, strained them to her bosom long and fast, while the tears rained down her cheeks, and her old eyes were so blurred that she could hardly see. For now that the lads indeed were going, the fountains of her heart were opened, and her trouble choked her speech. But before they went, she said unto them, even as Laban unto Jacob; and the scene, as she stood in the old-time porch, as the rain fell fast, and the winds blew cold without, a hand, shaking as with palsy, on the shoulder of either son—they with their heads

bowed and bared, she with the righteous glory of her silver locks—that scene was never to be forgotten by them until the time came for them to go home for ever.

“ ‘The Lord watch ’ ”—and her voice trembled so that she could hardly speak—“ ‘the Lord watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another.’ ” Then she turned and went into the house, and left them there.

But the girls went with them to the garden gate. Said Mary, as John held her in his arms, and she laid her head upon his breast, “ You will think of me every day, and of us all at home. Promise me you will ; and however great your work may be, or how many friends you make, you will write to me each week. You will promise that ? For although you may be going, I do mean to make it seem as though you were not. For whether you go or stay, you must be all the same to me, and to all of us at home. For, John ”—this shyly, and in a lower tone—“ this is still your home. Promise me that you will think of it always as your home, even though you are not with us all the time.”

He promised her, as with a good conscience

he might dare to do ; for the true man, no matter what his age or circumstances, always thinks of the place where his early days were spent, and where his parents lived and loved him well, as home—his home on earth. It is pleasant to hear a man in the prime of life, with his wife and children at his side, speak of the folks “at home ;” in the mind of such an one, home—where he was innocent, so far as man can ever be, where he first knew God and love—and heaven are not divided much ; and both are dear unto his soul.

But Alice said to Oliver, while the tears started to the lad’s eyes, and his face was hot with pain—

“Ollie, dear, I want you to promise me something ; I know you will, it will make me so happy if you do. Will you read your Bible at the same time I do ? I read mine each night at ten ; will you read yours then too ? If you do, it will be as though we had not parted ; each night we shall seem to meet again ; for while we read we shall both be side by side before the throne of God. Will you promise me, Ollie dear ? it will make me so happy if you will.”

Ollie promised her ; what is the value of

such a promise as that God alone can tell ; may He grant that it is great. There are moments in the lives of the Oliver Freemans of this world when they are ready to promise anything to any one ; they take, in their most literal sense, the words of the preacher : “ To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heavens ; ” you may hear them say—and it is a fair specimen of the thoughtfulness of their general utterance—that there is a time for everything ; forgetting that ALL time is the time for them to be wise, and NO time the time for them to sin. It is the custom of such like to do, as the scribes and Pharisees and hypocrites did, to strain at a gnat yet swallow a camel. They have Scripture texts at the tips of their tongues, which they will interpret with the most astounding literalism, if by so doing they can be twisted to their own desires ; but they will split the finest hairs, shuffle out of the obvious sense of the most familiar words, if the text should happen to be disagreeable to them. The truth is, texts picked out at random are not to be recklessly used either on one side or the other, certainly not to be studied apart from the context, and never to be arbitrarily

interpreted without a sure and certain knowledge of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Study God's Word as a whole, not in part; be careful how you pick and choose the parts which best fall in with your mood or whim; attain to a reasonable comprehension of the WHOLE Christian plan before you dip into the sacred Book in search of a line or verse which is peculiarly adapted to your palates. It is a fearful thing to trifle with your God; let us be at all times careful that the horror of such a situation is not our own.

When Old John's turn came for parting, with odd simplicity and a quiet manner which told a story of its own, he took a hand of each, and said—

“God bless ye, lads; God bless ye both, and be with ye in all ye do.”

Then they were gone. He left them at the station door; when they were inside the office he turned his horse's head, and started off for home. They wondered that he did not come in and see them in the train and on their way; but a strange feeling kept them quiet, and they did not express their wonder. While on his part his heart was almost breaking, for a suspicion had suddenly sprung up from some-

thing Oliver had said ; he would not come in and see them go, for he thought they would be ashamed, for it would be treating them like children in the eyes of all the world, when they were men. So he drove away, in the old dog-cart, through the muddy lanes and chilly rain, his heart almost breaking with the thought that it could ever have entered into their minds to conceive that by any possibility they could have been shamed by him. Shamed by him ! The old man's trembling lips were dumb ; was it possible—and at the thought the old man sat like a statue in his cart—that they were ashamed of him ? God help the father who is afraid of that.

Yet as he drove along mechanically through his mind were passing the words of his beloved Psalm. The Spartan child hugged the wolf unto his breast ; but not even he made this agony the occasion of his praise.

“ Bless the Lord, O my soul : and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits : who forgiveth all thine iniquities ; who healeth all thy diseases ; who redeemeth thy life from destruction ; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies. . . .

Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust. As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him, and His righteousness unto children's children. . . . Bless ye the Lord, all ye His hosts; ye ministers of His, that do His pleasure. Bless the Lord, all His works in all places of His dominion; bless the Lord, O my soul."

Such is the cry which rose from David's heart; such is the cry which, at all seasons, should rise from ours; for certainly if we were to remember all the blessings for which we have to thank the Lord, our life would be, as it should be, one long psalm of praise.

THE END.

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